

The price of choice

by The lazy stalker

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Summary: You plan for peace, and you plan for war. That's the secret to always win. Feedback is always welcomed, ALWAYS.

1. Chapter 1

A million thanks to my beta HungryDemon who helped greatly with the quality of my writing.

Disclaimer: I own squat, do you think if I actually owned any of this franchises I would be writing fanfics about them? Heck no! I would be rolling around in sweet sweet money.

* * *

><p>Chapter 1<p>

It was a beautifully clear morning in the Highlands, a kind of calm permeated the atmosphere, the air was crisp, the sun was bright and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. It was the kind of rare morning that makes you want to go out and do something outside because it seems as if the possibilities are endless, as if anything could and would happen. Of course, none of this mattered to the two bored watchmen sitting on a sentry tower, gazing towards the ocean, waiting patiently for their shift to be over so they could go home and get some sleep.

"T'was the most incredible thing I ever saw, it was. One second it's a bear, then the lass covers it with some curtain an' bam, The Queen was there." The watchman made some elaborate gestures with his arms "Who would've thought magics like those were real?"

"A know Ewan, A was there! Ye think a don' remember a bloody bear turning into the Queen?" The other guard shook his head in exasperation "It's been six months and I'm already sick of that story."

"Jus' making conversation is all." Ewan responded. "Don't need to bite me head off."

"Then do yer job an let me do mine!"

"Job?" Ewan laughed. "Ye expect something to happen out here? Pixies? A sea monster? Maybe a ship full of Vikingsâ€|" Ewan's voice trailed off at the last one.

"Jus' cause I take ma job seriously doesn't mean you can jus'â€|"

"No, no!" Ewan pointed towards the ocean "That's a Viking warship in ta distance!"

"Yer sure?"

"'Course I'm bloody sure! No one's daft enough to sail a ship like tha!"

The other guard was already on his feet, "a'll go warn the village. Ye take a horse an go warn the king!"

"Aye." Ewan started making his way down from the observation post. _An it was such a good morning, too._

XxX

Castle Dunbroch

The night watchman rode as swiftly as he could towards the imposing castle in the distance and was quickly let through when he told the guards he had important news for the king. He was led to the dining hall where the royal family enjoyed their breakfast. King Fergus was animated as usual, retelling the tale of Mor'du, now with a new ending, he was in the middle of miming the queen attacking Mor'du, much to her chagrin, when the door swung open.

"Yer Majesty! Yer Majesty I bring ill tidings from the coast"

The king's expression didn't change; it was as if nothing could destroy his good cheer. "Well, spill it already."

"The Vikings, Yer Majesty, there's a Viking ship approaching."

That, however, did.

"What! Those stinking savages! If they think they can jus walk here an take what they please they got another tin comin!"

Fergus screamed for the guards and started barking orders, getting ready to depart; he stopped cold at the door of the dining hall when he heard his wife's voice.

"I am coming as well." Her tone left no room for argument. Fergus did it anyway.

"Absolutely nae! It's dangerous."

"Something about this is not right Fergus, I can feel it! I am going

with you, whether you want me to or not."

Fergus sighed and hugged his love. Ever since the incident with Mor'du six months ago something had changed within the Queen, it was hard to pinpoint exactly what it was, but she seemed more aware, more observant; and when she had gut feeling either good or bad it always came true. Some people had even started whispering that not all of the bear had left and that she now had a deeper connection with the spirits of the land.

"Very well, but ye will not gae close to any fighting ye understand?"

"I will no get in the way of your fighting my King. I just feel that I must go with you, that it is important I be there by your side."

It was mid-afternoon when the king arrived at the small port town of Invernes and the Viking ship seemed to be taking its sweet time getting there, leisurely advancing at a slow pace.

King Fergus was tempted to just grab a few boats, fill them with warriors and take the fight to them, but Vikings were masters of nautical warfare and taking the clash to where they had the advantage would not do him any favors. Instead he used the opportunity to properly prepare: he had the town evacuated and filled it with soldiers, built a camp outside of town for the Queen and reinforcements in case they had some nasty surprise waiting for them, and still the ship hadn't arrived.

The troops were starting to get nervous.

"Wot is taking them so bloody long?"

"Calm down laddie, or yer gonnae keel over before the tussle even starts."

"Is jus' that it's strange is all, why are they coming so slowly?"

"Shut up!" The King roared, having overheard the conversation. His voice gradually rose in volume until he was shouting "If those arrogant savages give us enough time to prepare then I say we make them pay for their mistake. In blood!" he punctuated his statement with a war shout that was echoed by all.

When the Viking ship finally docked the last thing anyone expected to see coming out of it was a single Viking waving a white flag. When some of the soldiers recognized the Viking doing the deed, the murmurs started anew. The man was somewhat tall and skinnier than anyone would have expected a Viking to be. He had a surprisingly well shaved face and was dressed in the crude clothes of a Viking: brown pants and a heavy winter coat made of animal furs stitched together over a green wool tunic, a thick leather belt and a huge broadsword strapped to his back finished the ensemble.

It was his helmet that gave away his identity, two dark horns pointing backwards in such a way that anyone standing behind him would have to be careful not to get stabbed in the face. Only one man was known to wear a helmet like that.

"Backstab the Cunning." The King growled.

"Fergus the Bear King, I presume?"

"You should know by now Vikings aren't welcomed in these lands!"

The king's declaration was confirmed by the roar of the soldiers behind him.

"I just came to talk." The Viking lifted a small chest he was carrying with his other hand. "I even brought you a present."

Fergus was just about to retort something along the lines of _I _didn't, and start the attack when the words of his wife stopped him; he actually had to turn around to make sure she wasn't there. Grimacing as if he swallowed something nasty he nodded.

"Do not think fer even one second that A believe ye. But if it will save lives I'll humor ye. Try anything funny and you'll have ten spears in yer hide before ye finish blinking."

"Fair enough, I suppose."

"Ten men with me! The rest of you: If someone else comes off that boat fill them full of pointy things!" A second roar answered him.

Backstab was led to a camp outside of town where he saw even more soldiers waiting for them. _Reinforcements, _he thought, this made him smile for some reason. They stopped outside a big tent surrounded by guards.

"Wait here until I call ye." He turned to one of the guards. "Ye know what to do." And entered the tent.

"All right, off with yer weapons!"

The Viking gave the guard a strange look but complied with taking off the broadsword on his back, and a dagger from his belt, and another, and another, from his boots, his coat, his sleeves, his pants, a total of twelve daggers of various shapes and sizes were handed to the guard.

"Is that all? Are ye sure?"

"I can still kill you with my bare hands. Does that count?"

Another guard approached the Viking. "I'll just check ye to make sure."

"Don't touch me!" Backstab took a step back and glared at the second guard. "I don't like being touched!"

The guard ignored him.

When king Fergus went back outside he was greeted by the sight of one of his guards carrying a small armory, another frozen in place with one of his arms extended as if to grab something and the rest pointing their spears at a bored looking Backstab.

"I'm not gonnae ask. Follow me."

"Your guards need to learn more manners."

"Shut up!"

The inside of the tent was decorated with a few shields and the banner of the Dunbroch clan. The Viking sat at one end of rectangular table and idly noted a goblet filled with wine set before him, he was surprised to find Queen Elinor sitting on the opposite end of the table. The meeting didn't start officially until the King took a seat by her side.

"Backstab the Cunning." Fergus began.

"Knifnut Thorston, at your service. That whole Backstab business is just a nickname I picked up somewhere."

Fergus rolled his eyes. "I wonder why?"

The Viking's smirked. "It's kind of self-explanatory."

"So it is. But tell me. What makes ye think you'll be allowed back on yer ship? Yer a wanted man after all. A very wanted man."

"And here I thought you didn't like me." The Viking scratched his chin. "But seriously? Two reasons: The first one is that the execution of a foreign dignitary-" Fergus snorted at that "-is cause for war. The secondâ€¦" His voice trailed off as if he suddenly realized something. "Say, that was a pretty impressive show of force back at the dock. All those soldiers, and in the town too, not to mention the reinforcements and all those extras that I'm sure aren't supposed to leave the Queen's side for any reason."

He smiled rather predatorily. "It's amazing how many people can be mobilized by the sight of a slowly approaching Viking warship. Tell me, did you pull any of those men from Kiltton? From Underbridge maybe? From both of them perhaps? That would make them very tempting targets for faster, more discreet ships. The kinds of ships that could easily sneak around while everyone else was looking elsewhere."

Knifnut stared intensely at the pair. "The price of my life is two under defended port towns razed to the ground."

The Queen paled with dread while King Fergus turned red with rage. "You murderous monster!"

"Calm yourself before you keel over. I haven't done anything but provide myself a means of escape. The axe is in your hands as they say."

"Why you!"

"You will both stop this pointless posturing immediately!"

Queen Elinor had recovered her composure as she realized that: as the Viking in front of her was using the towns as hostages for his life; the longer they stood around talking, the more danger those people

were in. She had to get rid of him as quickly as possible. Vikings were not known for their patience.

"Tell us what you have come here to say and leave."

The raider nodded. "Regardless of my past intentions whenever I stepped in your lands, today I have come to tell you a story." He paused for a second to check their reactions: Queen Elinor remained impassive while King Fergus had a look on his face that clearly meant 'how stupid do you think I am?'

Knifnut decided to direct his effort towards the Queen.

"For the last 300 years the Vikings of Berk have been in a constant war against an enemy more powerful than what you can imagine, and then suddenly we're not. I won't bore you with the details, but know this, for the first time in 300 years there is peace, but for how long? Peace is such a fragile thing, don't you agree?"

Knifnut picked up his goblet and eyed the contents wearily before putting it back down.

"Right now everyone's happy." _Well, mostly everyone_. An image of Mildew came to his mind. "Three centuries of constant war is a bit much, even for us Vikings, and right now everyone's enjoying a much needed vacation."

He laughed as if it that was some kind of private joke and continued.

"Eventually people will start to get twitchy; we have been fighting for too long, it's a part of who we are now, before long we'll fight again. So don't be surprised if the next wave of raids you encounter is done on the backs of dragons."

Fergus couldn't take it anymore. "An ye came all this way to brag about it!"

"Fergus!" The Queen admonished lightly. "Get to the point Captain Knifnut."

The Viking's eyes narrowed for a second before he caught himself.

"My point is that the times are changing, and so, the chief of Berk Stoic the Vast has thought it wise to try and extend the peace, to other long time enemies. In other words, I have come to propose an alliance."

The stomachs of both monarchs dropped at those words. They knew what an arrangement like that would entail.

The Queen recovered first. "If it is peace you are truly after, you and your clan will not be denied. But know this, the times are changing for us too, and if you had plans to cement this alliance with marriage, you must know that whomever you pick for such endeavor will have to win her heart before he even thinks to have her hand."

"That is not negotiable." The King growled out.

"Her heart?" Knifnut looked flabbergasted "You mean love?" he rolled the word around as if it left a bad taste in his mouth. "And how do you propose we do that? I doubt you would lend us the princess for a proper Viking courtship."

"Is that what you call whacking them over the head with a mace?"

"The wife never complained, said it got her on the mood."

"Be that as it may," Queen Elinor interrupted before both males started bickering. "You are correct in your assumption that we will not 'lend' you the princess, howeverâ€|"

"Ye can bring who ye chose here and he'll be given the same chances as her _other _suitors." Fergus's tone and giant smile clearly showed how likely he thought the chances of his daughter falling for some Viking.

Knifnut mulled it over for a minute. "I can work with that. Very well; if everything goes smoothly then the chief's only son, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third will arrive in two months time, carrying a rough draft of the alliance treaty so you can go over it."

"That is acceptable, now please leave."

At the Queen's dismissal Knifnut bit back a proper Viking retort and put on a big smile. "Don't be so hasty, Your Majesty, just one more thing and I will go. Presents!"

He stood and placed the chest he had been carrying on the table.

"I wouldn't use it in a fight if I were you, and don't play around with it, it's probably still poisonous, oh and don't worry about your guard he'll be able to move again in a few hours."

XxX

Some time later; aboard the Viking ship.

"How'd it go, boss?"

"Both better and worse than I expected it. At least I managed to get rid of that gaudy thing Craftnut made for me."

"He's gonna be pissed when he finds out you know?"

"Are you kidding me? He got to create a symbol of peace between two previously warring nations. He'll be ecstatic."

"'Cept we're not at war, or a nation, an they probably chucked that thing in the trash by now."

Knifnut waved off the other Viking in a way that clearly meant he would handle it and ordered a signal sent to the other ships. As he saw twin streamers of fire going towards the distance he took a minute to marvel at the youngest Haddock's cleverness, to be able to replicate the look, if not the intensity or the destruction of a dragon's fire took a special kind of talent. He never got the whole

story of how he did it; something about a Nadder's breath and Hiccup and the Ingerman boy getting stuck on an island without their dragons. It didn't matter anyway. The important part was that they had a way to signal other ships that no one else could imitate.

He turned to look at the retreating mainland and growled softly, he didn't actually gave a Gronkle's fart about making peace with a bunch of skirt wearing Highlanders, but he had plans, glorious plans that required Stoic's son married off to someone without Viking blood, and some airheaded princess was perfect. But now that that part was in question, he felt like he had made the trip in vain. No matter! He would make this work in his favor somehow, he would not have his people's glorious destiny ruined by something as stupid as a teenager inability to score.

"All right people; let's go kill ourselves some Goths!"

The cheer that answered him was music to his ears.

* * *

><p>Chapter 1 is all done, yay, remember to review, what did you like what did you not like etc. And while you're at it could someone tell me what is Merricup week and why did it start on a Wednesday? Is it one of those fake holidays pushed down our throats by fat-cat multinational corporations to sell merchandise? Is that it!? IS IT!? (pant, pant.) Sorry about that.

2. Chapter 2

I own not a thing, all characters and franchises used in this work of fiction are the property of people who are not me, seriously, not even one of them is me.

Many thanks to my beta HungryDemon who takes the slop I write and turns it in to something readable.

* * *

><p>Chapter two<p>

As soon as the Viking raider was out of sight, King Fergus ordered his forces to check on the two towns they had used as a way to escape. Once done, both monarchs watched silently as the ship shrunk in the distance. They were suitably surprised when they saw twin fireballs emerge from the ship and race off in opposite directions.

The queen was suddenly reminded of a slip-up the Viking made that sounded much too deliberate to be one. _So don't be surprised if the next wave of raids is done on the backs of dragons. _At the time she dismissed it as the barbarian trying to be poetic, mere posturing; gods knew the lords loved making outrageous claims, but now a seed of doubt was planted in her mind. Had she not been turned into a bear just six month ago? Still, if that was a possibility, why did he merely hint at it instead of pushing aggressively as any other Viking would? She gave a very un-royal sigh. All her questions only led to more questions. She needed more information.

Her husband looked at her with concern. "Are ye fine love?"

"I just want to go home, my king."

"Aye." He nodded and started barking orders in case the Vikings returned.

Queen Elinor heard none of it, too engrossed in her own thoughts. _How am going to break this to Merida? _She and her daughter had undoubtedly gotten closer in the months following her incident, and while Merida had gotten better at thinking before acting, her daughter still possessed a fiery temperament and a stubborn streak a mile long. She would also have to calm down the lords, who would certainly throw a fit over an alliance with hated enemies, even if it was only one of the tribes.

"â€| an woot the heck happened to Sheamus? Forget it A donae want to know anymore, tell me about it tomorrow!"

The Queen smiled despite herself, regardless of the situation, nothing brought her husband down.

Nighttime, Castle Dunbroch.

The first thing Elinor did when she was welcomed home by her children was to envelop her daughter in a bone-crushing hug. "My darling Merida, you have grown in to a wonderful beautiful person right before my eyes!"

The redhead was caught off guard by the sudden affection, but returned the hug nonetheless.

"Mum?"

The Queen's mind was already elsewhere talking to a vassal. "I need to talk to Seacht as soon as possible. Arrange a meeting, you know what to do."

"At once, my Queen."

Merida just stood there dumfounded, staring at her dad. "Woot the heck was that!?" Then winced as she heard, "A princess does not curse, honey," from further in the castle.

"Yer mother is jus tired dear, we'll tell ye all about it tomorrow," Fergus told her.

Next morning Fergus watched his wife calmly brushing her hair by the window, apparently deep in thought. At least she didn't looked so worried anymore, he knew over thinking any situation could be problematic, leaving yourself open to doubt when simple action was necessary was dangerous. He himself wasn't too worried as he was sure things would work out in the end. Sure, they might end up in a war with bloody savages, but it wasn't as if they were on friendly terms anyway. Nothing would change, a good Scott would never run away from a fight and if the Vikings came, the clans would beat them again.

"Woot are ye thinking love?"

"I believe the situation it is not as dreary as I imagined it yesterday. I'm more concerned about Merida and how she will react to the news. She is a strong girl, brave and willful, but she is still too impulsive. I failed to realize that last time and it almost caused a war."

"Bah, she's a good lass, an things will be fine. We'll put up with some smelly Viking for a little while an' kick him out when she doesn't pick him. At worst he'll try to kidnap her or she'll pump him full of arrows, no loss there."

"You speak of this as if it were a laughing matter."

Fergus laughed. "If someone tries anything with Merida, a sword in his gut is the least of his worries."

When Merida and her brothers sat down to have breakfast, she felt glad that her mother looked like she was over what was bothering her last night. She strolled confidently to the table to hear what it was her father was making faces about.

"â€|do we really need Seacht fer this?"

"He is one of your most loyal men. I will never understand why you do not like him."

"Because he keeps making googily eyes at ye!"

The queen rolled her eyes in a most undignified manner. "Honestly Fergus. He is just being friendly."

"Aye, being friendly with me wife!"

The queen hid a smile, that particular vassal being one of the few things she could tease her husband about. She greeted her children and scolded the triplets for trying to feed their breakfast to the dogs.

"Merida." She put aside the salmon she was eating. "Your father has something important to tell you."

"Now?" Fergus looked surprised and went thru a series of expression as he tried to figure out how to break the news to his daughter before turning to his wife for some help. The calm look on her face told him he was alone in this. Finally, he decided to carry on as delicately he could, counting on his many years as King to tell his daughter the news with tact and subtlety.

"Yer getting another suitor!"

Elinor palmed her face.

"What!" Merida immediately leaped out of her seat; her head darted between her parents, eyes asking for an explanation. She got one from the Queen.

"Yesterday," She began in a tone Merida immediately recognized as her 'royal tone', "A Viking ship was sighted just off the coast of Invernes. Instead of an attack, we found that the Vikings came looking for an alliance between our kingdom and their tribe, as you

already know, such political moves usually involve a marriage contract between the parties involved."

Merida covered her face with her hands. "This is a nightmare. Tell me yer joking, Dad!"

"Yes, well, ye seeâ€¦ it's like this, ummâ€¦"

She turned to her mother. "How can ye do this to me? Wasn't last time enough? A already have three suitors, ain't that plenty already!? An' now yer telling me A have to marry some Viking?"

"Merida!" The Queen responded with some fire in her voice "You do not _have _to marry anyone! The deal we made still stands with the lords and it will stand with the Vikings as well," Her tone softened. "Not a thing we do is without consequences-" Merida flinched at that. "-Postponing your decision will make more people try to win your hand."

"Well it's nae fair!" She responded.

"I know, but that is the way it works; and for now the consequence is that we will have to put up with this Viking until he either grows bored or you choose whom you will marry."

Merida tried to imagine what he would look like, and the image that came to her was of a hulking muscle bound brute wearing a bearskin and holding an axe, a few flies seemed to be circling him as visible stink lines wafted from him. Merida shuddered and the caveman like figure belched loudly before disappearing.

"Absolutely nae! Why do we even need to have peace with them, we can jus' fight 'em off when they come!"

"Merida," Elinor chastised lightly. "This is not just about you; it will be a trying time for us all and we will weather with dignity because we love you."

"Jus' donae kill the lass when he gets here." Fergus started laughing.

"Ah'em nae gonna kill him Dad!" She said in a huff.

XxX

It would be weeks before something even remotely interesting happened from Merida's point of view, seeing as everything continued exactly as it had before. She went riding, had classes, and exchanged correspondence with the lords; mainly with young Macintosh though, as he was the only one that wrote back legible letters, since the McGuffin heir's writing was just as indecipherable as his speech and wee Dingwall only ever sent back sketches and drawings.

On that particular day, in the middle of holding court, a messenger arrived and her parents cleared the throne room of people, herself and her brothers included, to hold a private audience. That was sufficiently out of the ordinary that instead of going riding and exploring which she often did as soon as she had a chance, Merida used one of the many secret passages in the castle to spy on the meeting.

She blushed when she saw a man wearing a kilt with the colors of the Dunbroch clan striding purposefully towards the throne; he had dark hair, thick eyebrows and a clean handsome face, not to mention that it looked as if he had a bear skin rug strapped to his chest! The man kneeled before his rulers before winking at the Queen, and just like that his charm vanished.

That cheeky bastard!

"Odhran Onchu Seacht, reporting for duty. How may I service you, your Highness?"

The Queen nodded, acknowledging the greeting. "Like you probably already know, we will soon begin peace negotiations with the Vikings, this move not only will cause some instability within the kingdom but it will also most likely change the political landscape between the Viking tribes; we need to know more in order to plan how to proceed, we would appreciate any information you have on the northlands."

"Could you be more specific?"

"Tell us about Berk, ye goof!"

"Berk, uh? That's a tough one; let me seeâ€¦all the information I have on Berk is secondhand at best since I've never been there before. Nobody wants to go there. The only explanation I could find was that it was dangerous to stay there for too long, so no one bothers." Seacht shrugged. "Let's start with the basics: Berk is an island smack in the middle of nowhere, it is populated by the Hairy Hooligan tribe and its warriors have a reputation as being one of the fiercest of all the Viking tribes, which is strange since they don't actually raid all that much. Even their involvement in the old war was minimum at best."

Seacht crossed his arms and briefly looked away; clearly uncomfortable with what he was about to say "Everything I say after that is rumors and whispers, mostly tavern talk and sailor tails. I have not been able to determine what is true and to what extent."

Fergus laughed loudly. "Ye mean the great Odhran Onchu Seacht has nae gotten the drop on these islanders? That's rich!"

The Queen glared at her husband before nodding at the man and motioning him to continue.

"According to these stories, Berk is the closest settlement to a place called Helheim's Gate; which is supposed to be a passageway to the underworld, so the people of that place have to deal with all manner of otherworldly beings. Some rumors say that they protect us by battling the creatures that spill forth from the Helheim's Gate, others that they are constantly at war with tribes even more savage than the Vikings, from even further north; were the snow is constant and night and day occur but once a year."

"And that's all ye have? Drunken slurs an' old wives' tales?" Fergus looked frustrated; none of what he had heard was of any use to him.

The vassal shrugged. "It is as I say. I never managed to set foot there, and besides the myriad of treaties all Viking tribes have with one another in order to keep them from tearing each other apart, they pretty much keep to themselves."

The Queen who had been listening attentively the whole time decided to bring the conversation back to more tangible matters. "Tell me, do you believe they could use the negotiations as a cover to stage an invasion?"

From behind her cover, Merida gasped.

"Doubtful," Seacht said, "To be frank I believe it to be the opposite," he explained, "News of Viking raids have been steadily decreasing over the last year, until they suddenly skyrocketed these last few months for reasons unrelated to this matter."

Queen Elinor nodded. When dealing with that Viking she had noted an undercurrent of desperation in his actions. If his tribe was modifying their ways to a more peaceful existence, a raider like that man would be anxious to prove he was still useful _the times are changing _she remembered him saying. _If the alliance becomes a reality he will take credit for it, and if it fails and we end up at war it will mean more battles for him._

She was taken out of her reverie by her husband's voice. "Wot is the cause of those raids?"

"From the information I've been able to gather; the leadership of the Berserker tribe has been passed down in typical Viking fashion, from Oswald the Agreeable to his son, Dagur the Deranged who is just as pleasant as his name suggests. And let me tell you, the kid seems to be on the warpath. As soon as he took the leadership he assembled an armada and started attacking anyone who could give him a good fight."

"Are we at risk?" The Queen had to know.

"Of raids? Most likely. An invasion? Probably not. No single Viking tribe could gain a solid foothold on our lands; he would need a legitimate reason in order to drag the other tribesâ€¦"

"Like refusing a treaty with a brother tribe." Interrupted Fergus, surprising the other two.

"It is possible," confirmed the vassal. "Failed talks of peace are usually followed by successful declarations of war. Does his Majesty wish for me investigate the situation further?"

"Nae," Fergus said, shaking his head. "Yer not me only pair of eyes. A have another job for ye. A have reports that a Roman physician, south of Hadrian's Wall, is close to recreating an ancient Greek weapon. Yer mission is to find an' stop this Dr. Julius No. Go find yer Quartermaster; he'll give ye more details an some gear. Ye can go now."

Seacht nodded and turned to the Queen. "My lady, it is a pleasure to assist in any way I can." He turned back to the King. "I'll take my leave, **M**ajesty."

As she watched the man called Seacht leave, Merida slumped against the wall she was hiding behind. This simple alliance pact was more complicated than she could have imagined, is this how things would be for her when she became Queen? For the first time in her life she felt inadequate.

* * *

><p>Be the first to find the not so hidden movie and get a mention.

After some serious soul searching I have come to a very important discovery about myself: I'm an egotistical jerk. So drop a line in the review box at the bottom of the chapter to let me know you're reading, and I'll make sure to keep writing.

3. Chapter 3

Greetings and salutations to Comet Moon who guessed correctly. If I ever have both the time and the inclination, I will write the adventure of this ancient 007.

As always many thanks to my Beta HungryDemon who instructs me in the ways of the force, I mean grammar... yes, grammar, and nothing else.

**For those of you who still think I own both Brave 2012 and the How to Train Your Dragon franchises, I would like to assure you that I in fact do not. **

* * *

><p>Chapter three<p>

As soon as he arrived back at Berk, Knifnut hunted down Stoick in order to report about his trip to the Highlands.

"â€| so then we looted the Hel' out of them and went home." He finished.

Stoick scratched his beard and nodded. "This could be a problem," He mused. "In order for the alliance to be strong enough for our purposes, that marriage is vital. Still, it's not all bad; it will certainly reduce the shock factor for Hiccup. Tell me, the Highlanders, what do you make of their rulers?"

"The King is just what you would expect, big and strong and impulsive. It's the Queen that's the dangerous one, she's clever, andâ€| diplomatic, she'll be our biggest obstacle. She didn't even follow proper negotiation protocol (1), and didn't seemed too impressed with my story either." He pouted.

"That's because you suck at telling stories," Stoick explained.

"Anyway," Knifnut continued. "We can't rule out the possibility that she made up that love condition in order to buy time."

"It doesn't matter," Stoick's voice was serious. "They set the rules, and now we'll _all _have to play by them, even them."

"Which still leaves us with the problem that this all depends on Hiccup's ability to seduce women."

Stoick looked offended. "He's on pretty friendly terms with Astrid you know?"

"Astrid? Oh, you mean the Hofferson girl. No offence chief, but he killed a dragon the size of a mountain in front of her while riding a Night Fury; they should have married seven times by now. If they're not, or at the very least shacking up in secret, that relationship is going nowhere."

Stoick nodded, conceding the point. "What do you propose we do then? It's not like we can teach the boy about romance ourselves. I'll never know what Val ever saw in me, and you had to beat your wife up before she would even acknowledge your courtship." He chuckled. "I'll never know how you did it, Bertha was tougher than me!"

"I slipped a little something in her food the day before, so she wouldn't be at full strength," was the casual response.

It made Stoick laugh. "And she still busted one of your kneecaps and broke your arm."

"And three of my ribs, I also couldn't see straight for a month afterwards." Knifnut got a faraway look in his eyes for a moment before he shook it off. "Standing here reminiscing is not going to help your son. If we can't help him, there must be someone who can!"

Stoick smiled. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

Knifnut smiled as well. "I'll round up the guys and get some kegs!"

Stoick started to leave to go search for his son. "Knifnut."

"Yes, chief?"

"Forget the ale. We're going to need the strongest stuff you can find."

After a bit of searching, Stoick found his son at the dragon academy. The twins and Snotlout were practicing their dragon's aim by making them shoot at a stone statue; Astrid was trying to be as accurate as possible by making her Nadder shoot spikes at a series of shields. Hiccup and Fishlegs seemed to be working on the book of dragons, their own dragons just lounging around.

"Hey, Dad. What are you doing here?"

"I need to have a chat with you, in private."

"If this I about that Yak skeleton puppet; I swear I don't know who's behind it, or why it demanded tributes to Ogg the Gorilla Emperor."

"That's not why I'm here Son, come with me."

Stoick and Hiccup walked thru the village for a little while before Stoick decided to begin speaking.

"Tell me, Son, do you remember that whole mess we had with the Berserkers a while back?"

"A guy like Dagur is a little hard to forget, Dad."

Stoick nodded. "Yes. Well, what you don't know; is how close we came to an all out war with the Berserkers, in no small part because of my actions." Hiccup was surprised to hear that. "We were lucky this time, however, the chances of war are almost certain in the future. And since you won't let the dragonsâ€¦"

"We're not discussing that, Dad!" Hiccup said annoyed.

"No, we're not," placated Stoick. "I said that the decisions concerning the dragons would be yours as long as they didn't put the village at danger, and I will stand by my word. But, since the easy answer is out, I've been forced to make some hard choices to ensure peace."

"Well, you did tell me that doing what's right was rarely doing what was easy."

"I'm glad you remember that Son, because I'm being forced to make an alliance pact with the Scotts."

"That's great Dad! I mean, we can't be fighting everyone all time."

"I don't think you understand the situation Son. When an event like this takes place, it's customary to seal and strengthen the deal by means of a marriage between the former enemies."

"That sounds reasonable, wait, what!? You can't be serious Dad! I mean what about? What I mean is, how could? Oh, this is a disaster."

"Son, listen to me. Son, Son, Hiccup, calm down!" Stoick started patting Hiccup on the back when his son started hyperventilating; this had the unfortunate side effect of flooring Hiccup. Good thing it worked

Out of the many questions and thoughts filling Hiccup's mind at the moment only one of them seemed to have any importance while he picked himself off the floor. "Why, Dad?"

Stoick rubbed his forehead and looked away for a moment. "Listen to me, because this is important. We need this alliance in order to make it difficult for Dagur to attack just because he thinks we would give him a good fight or made peace with the dragons."

"What about Astrid?" He asked in a small voice.

Stoick's eyes softened, showing sympathy. "What about her, Son?" His face suddenly turned worried. "You're not shacking up with her in secret, are you?"

Hiccup paled, he knew the consequences of doing something like that; best case scenario would involve an axe in his chest from her relatives. "No Dad, we haven't." He slumped knowing why his dad had asked about that. He had a whole year to speak to his father about starting negotiations with the Hoffersons, but he didn't feel ready yet and figured he still had more time. They were all busy with the dragon academy and he knew no other family would try to enter negotiations with them out of respect. He had waited too long and the choice was taken out of his hands. "So, you're just chucking me in to a marriage with some Scottish's chief daughter."

"I wish. Things are more complicated than that."

"That sounds comforting."

"The Scotts have strange customs Son, and apparently this princess-"

"Princess?"

"-has several suitors already, so you will have to win her hand by making her fall in love you."

"Oh, that sounds wonderful, how did you even come up with a plan like that?"

Stoick looked away.

Flashback

The day after Dagur left, Stoick called for a meeting in the great hall in order to decide how to act. Possible solutions and their consequences were discussed, although it looked like they couldn't reach an agreement, until Knifnut started pushing forth an idea they had already rejected.

"I'm begging you to reconsider chief. It's our only option!"

Stoick crossed his arms. "Are you questioning my decision?"

Knifnut took a step back, putting his hands in a placating gesture. "Don't get me wrong chief, if there's a war I'll be there at the front, for you and for Berk. But this is not an issue to be taken lightly. I know Dagur better than anyone here, and I know he's just looking for a fight, when he finds out we do have dragons; that little prick won't care that we just sort of keep them around, he will only see a cause for war and take it. We must be ready! We have toâ€¦!"

Spitelout interrupted. "This again? A little twig like you might need someone to fight for him. But the rest of us are Vikings, and we will fight like Vikings!"

"And when we do, we'll go at it alone!" Countered Knifnut. "None of the other tribes, with the possible exception of the Bog Burglars will lift a finger against the Berserkers. The treaties Oswald made will hold, even with his son's insanity."

"If that's the problem then we'll just get other allies, how hard can

it be?" Gobber didn't see what all the fuzz was about.

"And who do you propose for that? The Romans? The Goths? The Danes?" Knifenut's tone indicated how well he thought that would go. "We might as well declare war now."

Stoick, who had been mostly silent during the meeting, spoke up. "We will seek an alliance with the Scotts. Even if we were once enemies, Berk's role in the war was small. We can use that to our benefit."

Gobber scratched himself. "You know what something like that would need right? What about Hiccup?"

Stoick didn't hesitate. "It will be hard for the boy, but, if it's for the good of the village he will do it."

Knifenut who had started sulking, perked up at that. "You're right! The Scotts aren't very strong, but there are a lot of them. Enough, that they were able to push back the invasion. If we had those numbers backing us up, it would, at the very least, make the Berserkers hesitate to start hostilities on a mere whim; they would need a legitimate excuse."

"Not to mention that their fashion sense is to die for," added Gobber.

"Does anyone object?" asked Stoick.

The other Vikings didn't look too convinced, but didn't speak against the chief out of respect for his son's sacrifice.

"I want to be the one to do this," started Knifenut. "I'm the least threatening looking, and my chances of getting out of there alive are good."

Stoick nodded. "Very well. But, Knifenut. You will not make use of the dragons to press the issue, understand?"

Knifenut's mouth became a grim line but he nodded.

End flashback.

"That doesn't matter Son; what's important is that in order for this alliance to be strong enough for what we need it, you have to marry the princess. The Highlanders would never accept you as their king, since it was a Viking invasion that formed their kingdom, as a result, the only option would be for the princess to move to Berk. So if worse comes to worse and the Berserkers attack, they would have no choice but to send troops as reinforcements."

Hiccup raised an eyebrow. "That soundsâ€¦ complicated, and devious."

Stoick flinched. "Big problems need big solutions. And it was you who taught me to think outside the box."

"Yay. Lucky me"

"I understand that news like that could be a little shocking,-"

"A little?"

"-so, to prepare you, I'm starting you, in an ancient Viking tradition." He put his arm around his son. "Getting completely wasted."

What followed next would haunt Hiccup's nightmares for months afterwards: He was led to the great hall, where what looked like the entire adult male population of Berk had gathered to 'celebrate' his 'engagement' which actually meant giving him drunken relationship advice about the best way of making the princess fall in love with him.

Whatever it was they were all drinking, it made his eyes and throat burn and the Vikings tipsy way faster than usual. Hiccup drank it as if it were water. For the first time in his life, Hiccup cursed his insanely high alcohol tolerance as he tried to drink himself stupid, both to stop listening and to forget what was being said to him. He finally passed out in the middle of a lecture about how to use stump attachments as marital aids.

XxX

The next day Hiccup dragged himself to the dragon academy leaning heavily on Toothless. He had dark rings under his bloodshot eyes; his hair was in disarray and sticking out in odd angles, his clothes were not any better.

The twins noticed him first.

"Wow, you look worse than Tuffnut."

"Yeah." Nodded Tuffnut, who didn't recognize the insult. "Is it because of the Yak puppet?"

Snotlout stepped closer. "What happened to you, cuz? It looks like you lost a fight withâ€¦ well, everything."

Hiccup glared at his cousin for a moment before slumping. "I don't want to talk about it."

"Fine by me." Said Astrid, who knew how stubborn Hiccup could be, and recognized a hangover when she saw one. "We were just about to start practicing our dragon calls, right Fishlegs?"

"Well yea, but, maybe we shouldn't, because, Hiccupâ€¦" He shut up at seeing Astrid's glare. "I mean, yes?"

"So, you were telling me that the pitch of my Thunderdrum call was off?" She asked cheerily.

"Oh, yes." Fishlegs suddenly forgot all about Hiccup. "It's, UUUUUUAAAARRRRGGGGHHH!"

"You mean? UUUURRRRGGGGHHH!"

"No, no, more like, UUUUUUAAAARRRRGGGGHHH!"

"That's what I did, UUUUARRRRGGGGHHH!"

"Not quite, in the middle, you have to, UUUUUUAAARRRRGGGGHHH!"

"Ok, I give up! I'll talk!" Hiccup had collapsed face up on the floor, clutching his ears. "I need to marry some Scottish girl or we're going to war."

That got everyone's attention.

"What?"

"We're going to war? Cool!"

"That is gonna be awesome!"

"Hey Astrid, _I'm _available!"

"Why a Scott?"

Hiccup didn't answer, seeing as he was passed out on the floor.

"Come on." Astrid elbowed Snotlout in the gut. "Let's get him somewhere he can rest."

"Sure, and maybe after, we can go somewhere moreâ€¦ private" Snotlout wiggled his eyebrows.

Hookfang proved to be better at reading the mood than his master when he snatched Snotlout in his mouth and started shaking him like a chew toy.

"Alright, I get it! Not the time!" Snotlout muffled voice said, legs dangling out his dragon's mouth.

* * *

><p>(1)- Posturing, insults, threats, growls, threats, unreasonable demands, small contained physical violence, more threats, begrudging acceptance of more reasonable terms. Repeat as much as needed.<p>

* * *

><p>Did you know that every year, more than five gazzillion fan fics die of review starvation.

It's usually alright because the vast majority of them are horrible beyond belief, there is however a percentage of good ones that die because of reader neglect.

For just a few words a chapter you can sponsor the brainchild of some amateur writing for the hell of it.

Our operators are standing by.

4. Chapter 4

As always, many thanks to HungryDemon, who took a break from devouring souls to beta this.

I feel I must remind you I don't own How to Train Your Dragon nor Brave 2012. Don't know why tough.

* * *

><p>Chapter 4<p>

Hiccup woke up in his bed, somewhat disoriented, he didn't remember getting there; he took off the wet rag someone had placed on his forehead.

"Ugh, what happened?"

"We jus' got married and yer already acting as if ye don't remember? That's nae goodâ€|" A Scottish sounding voice answered him.

"Hiccup's eyes widened as he bolted to his feet, a decision he regretted immediately, since his legs gave out and he tumbled to the floor. He glared at Astrid who was holding her sides in laughter.

"Almighty Odin! You nearly gave me a heart attack." It only made her laugh harder.

"That's not funny." He sulked.

"I beg to differ." She giggled. "You should have seen your face." Her laughter eventually died. "Is it true?"

Hiccup grimaced "As far as I can tell, yes. My dad didn't give me the full story, but, the villagers are taking the threat of an attack from Dagur very seriously. They think that if we make a strong alliance with the Scotts we'll be seen as a big enough risk that Dagur won't attack" He scratched his head. "Or something like that."

"I don't think he'll care," replied Astrid.

"That's what I said!" Hiccup waved his arms nervously. "But Dad seems convinced that it will work."

"Your dad is chief for a reason. Maybe there are things we don't know about."

"I hope so," Hiccup muttered. "Because this whole thing depends on some princess choosing to marry me over her other suitors."

Astrid looked at him strangely. "I thought the marriage agreement was a done deal already?"

He shook his head. "No, it seems the Scotts want their princess to marry out of love, instead of doing it like, well, everyone else."

Astrid looked away; she had been hoping for something like that herself, not that she would ever tell anybody as it sounded incredibly girly. It was a forgone conclusion as far as anyone was concerned that she and Hiccup would eventually get married, ever

since that kiss they shared when he woke up after the battle with the Green Death. Marriages had been forged with far less; the vast majority of married couples didn't even knew each other before the wedding. Contract negotiations would have probably started immediately if not for the fact that no tradition could survive contact with Hiccup Horrendus Haddock the Third. A spark of hope had blossomed inside of her.

She turned to look at said Haddock as he gesticulated wildly while he ranted about the impossibility of making someone fall in love with him and gave a small mental sigh at the irony. She and Hiccup were not in love, but they were getting there; they certainly had come a long way from the disdainful indifference and simple-minded infatuation they had started with. In the year since their first adventure they had indeed grown closer as friends, he now saw her as a person instead of a symbol, and she now saw him as more than just the first dragon rider or the slayer of the biggest dragon in history. They had grown to be close friends and both saw and recognized qualities in each other that they admired and/or drove them nuts. It wasn't love yet, but they had time, except now they didn't.

When Hiccup started talking about possible ways of getting out of the engagement, she stopped him by placing her hands on the sides of his face and pressing her forehead against his. Hiccup blushed; it was the most intimate contact that they had ever shared. "Hiccup, listen to me. Do you remember the first time we trained against the Nadder in the maze?"

Hiccup nodded.

"Do you know why I was so angry at you? It was because we were finally given the chance to really help our village, to make a difference and save lives, and you treated it like a joke. If you had tried your best and failed, I wouldn't have minded one bit. I mean, you failed at everything back then, not only failed, you failed spectacularly."

"Stop saying that," He grumbled, a little annoyed.

She gave him a soft headbutt to shut him up. "We are Vikings Hiccup; everything about our lives is difficult. We survive because we are tougher than anybody else, and because we rely on each other. If marrying this princess will really help us, it will make Berk a safer place, then you should try with all your heart, because we are Vikings, and we don't do things in half measures."

Hiccup looked away and nodded. "I have to leave in a week," He said softly.

"For how long?"

"I don't know."

Astrid nodded. "Then we have a lot of work to do."

XxX

For the rest of the week Hiccup was busy preparing for his trip to the Highlands.

Parts of it were enjoyable, such as Gobber's rushed smithing courses, where he tried to cram, years of knowledge in the shortest amount of time into him. It was during those lessons that he learned just how much Gobber had really traveled while fleeing from the Boneknapper Dragon, and how much he still needed to learn. Apparently, he had been all over the known world learning and collecting all sort of weapon making techniques and skills.

Parts of it were mentally exhausting, such as planning the future of the dragon academy and training Astrid to take over for however long he would be gone. He also trusted the book of dragons to Fishlegs and gave him specific instruction about how to add to it; chief among them was, don't put number statistics about the dragons.

Parts of it were just unpleasant, such as dealing with the villager's efforts to turn him in to a woman slaying Casanova. Especially because the vast majority of them didn't seem to understand that he needed her to fall in love with him before the wedding, not after. This resulted in the type of advice that would get him executed if he were to even think of putting it to use. And of course, dealing with Mildew.

After a somewhat rushed meal, Hiccup was resting in the mead-hall before he had to meet with Gobber, when a raspy voice interrupted his musings.

"Well what do we have here?" Mildew saw Hiccup and just couldn't resist. "It never ceases to amaze me the lengths you will go to dishonor our tribe. First you bring those hellish beasts to the island, putting us all in danger and attracting the Outcasts, and now we might have to spill the blood of our brothers. Oh, the shame." He stalked closer to Hiccup. "And now poor Stoick is being forced to dilute his bloodline in a useless attempt at peace. Especially when we know that the real answer is getting rid of the dragons for good." He leaned closer to Hiccup. "And it would be such a shame if there were an incident with the dragons and you weren't here to fix it."

"I agree," said Knifnut, sitting on a nearby table, eating a plate of lamb. "With Hiccup gone, we will have to be extra careful, so that nothing bad happens. For my part, I'm going to be paying close attention to anything suspicious." He took a drink out of his tankard. "If something were to happen, it would be disastrous for all those involved." His tone turned sinister at the end before going back to normal. "Am I right Mildew?"

Hiccup turned to the old Viking, and was surprised to see he was a little pale.

Mildew grumbled something unintelligible before turning around and walking away.

"Hey, Hiccup," Knifnut said between bites. "Do you know why they call me Backstab?"

Mildew started walking faster.

"Not really." Hiccup felt there was some subtext he was missing.

"Well, it's not important anyway. Just wanted to see if you knew."

Hiccup nodded, happy to let it stay that way. Viking titles tended to be derived from particularly bloody events. A question _was _nagging him though. "Umm. Why did Mildew look like he was afraid of you for a moment?"

Knifnut shrugged. "No idea. Wellâ€¦ I did let him know how displeased I was over that armory incident when the Outcasts invaded. My father's sword was in there, you know?"

"Why didn't you just keep it in your house? I mean, sure, keeping something sharp and shiny in the same place the twins live is probably a bad ideaâ€¦andâ€¦youâ€¦" Hiccup trailed off nervously when he saw the other Viking put his plate aside, no longer hungry.

His eyes had hardened. "Because, I hated the bloody bastard." He shook his head to clear it. "But, the sword was valuable and I loath to dispense of anything that is still of use to me. Which was what I used to say to your father all the time whenever you got into trouble?"

"Thank you, that makes me feel appreciated."

Knifnut snorted. "Come off it boy!" He stood up to leave. "I always knew you were gonna do something great, It's just that every time you tried, a disaster happened, and I'm not talking about regular disasters either, they were spectacular."

"That's really not helping."

He was ignored.

"Nice talking to you Hiccup, Have a safe trip."

XxX

With just a few days until Hiccup's departure, Ruffnut found Astrid at the edge of the cliff, just staring at the ocean.

"Are you alright?" Ruffnut didn't need to specify, they both knew what she was talking about.

"I guess. I mean, it's not like we were a couple, we're just friends."

"Well, you should totally just clonk him in the head with something heavy and yell mine. That's what my dad did."

Astrid paused at that, as if considering it. "No, this alliance is too important. Besides, the princess might not even pick him."

"But she will." Ruffnut stretched her arms.

"Of course she will." Confirmed Astrid. "In a way, it's kind of a relief, you know?"

"Nope."

She slumped. "Me neither."

XxX

When the day of Hiccups departure came, a good number of people showed up at the cliffside to say goodbye.

The first one to say goodbye were his closest friends.

"So, where are we going again?" Tuffnut was still confused about that that one.

"We're not going anywhere mush for brains; Hiccup's gotta romance some Scottish broad." Ruffnut explained eloquently.

"I still believe they should have sent a real Viking." Snotlout crossed his arms. "Snotlout the love maestro could get the job done in minutes!"

Astrid elbowed him. "We need them to be our friends, moron, not go to war with them."

Snotlout shrugged off the blow and handed Hiccup a scroll filled with messy writing, "Here you go cuz. Don't say I never do anything for you. Here is a list of my super effective patented pickup lines, guaranteed to get the babes swooning for you. No, don't thank me; I know you probably don't stand a chance without them."

"Actually," Interrupted Fishlegs. "Because of his deeds, lineage and the rarity of his dragon, Hiccup has a pretty good chance, at least by Viking standardsâ€|" He trailed off, when he saw the others looking at him. "Good luck, Hiccup." He finished in a small voice.

Astrid stepped forth and gave him a tight hug. "We are Vikings, remember that." She whispered in his ear.

Hiccup nodded. "And Vikings don't do things half way." He whispered back.

When they separated they saw Bucket standing there, looking a little agitated "Oh, Hiccup. It's dangerous to go alone, take this."

"Thank you Bucket. I'm sure I'll find plenty of uses for itâ€|"

"It's me best bucket it is!"

"And I'll treasure it always." Hiccup assured him.

"He's not the only one with presents you know?" Gobber pushed his way thru the crowd.

"Hey, Gobber." Hiccup smiled at his mentor. "What's this about presents?"

"I got the feeling that you weren't paying much attention this week, what with you running around everywhere like a headless chicken, so I got you a little something to tie you over."

He presented a thick bundle of books and lone pages wrapped with a cloth and secured with a rope. "These papers are everything I wrote during my travels, and anyone who reads and understand them can become a master blacksmith with no problems."

"Wow, Gobber, this isâ€¦ I didn't know you had written all of that!" Hiccup was amazed.

"I _am _Bork's great-great-great-grandson, you know? It's in my blood." Gobber declared proudly.

Hiccup felt a lump in his throat as he received what was essentially Gobber's life's work.

"I-i don't know what to say."

"Well, you're giving them back to me when you come back. I'm just lending them t' you." Gobber didn't see what the big deal was. "Just be careful out there alright? You're not gonna have ol Gobber to bail you out of trouble, and for Thor's sake don't destroy their kingdom, we need them intact for now."

"Your trust is overwhelming." Hiccup tone was as dry as a desert.

The last to say goodbye was his father. "Son, Iâ€¦"

Hiccup interrupted him "It's okay Dad. I understandâ€¦"

"I'm still sorry for it," confirmed Stoick.

"We're Vikings. It's an occupational hazard." Hiccup reminded him.

"We're Viking. It's an occupational hazard." Stoick agreed.

"So."

"So."

"Yeah."

"Yes."

"I'll be back, probably." Hiccup said.

"And I'll be here," Stoick intoned. "Maybe."

Hiccup hugged his dad and turned to leave.

Toothless looked bored and annoyed.

Hiccup scratched the dragon's head "I'm sorry about ignoring you this whole week bud." Toothless huffed. "Yes, I know, I'm horrible. But now we're going to fly as much as you want for as long as you want. For days in fact."

That got Toothless to instantly forgive him. Hiccup mounted his best

friend and urged him on. Exited as he was about flying again after a week of staying on land, Toothless didn't notice Hiccup's sad tone.

"Let's go, buddy."

Toothless immediately took flight and they started to put distance between them and the island. To Hiccup's credit, he didn't look back once.

As boy and dragon started getting smaller in the distance Astrid narrowed her eyes, turned around and started walking away. "Come on guys, we have work to do."

* * *

><p>A mention for the first one to guess the memetic video game reference.<p>

Next chapter: Hiccup and Merida finally meet.

* * *

><p>Look, up in the sky!

Is it a bird?

Is it a plane?

Is it a nerd?

No! Well, yes, but it's not just any nerd.

Its Amateur Writer Man!

Fighting boredom, one chapter at a time.

When we last saw our hero, he was saving a shipment of new chapters from being hijacked by bandits, when he was suddenly attacked by his archenemy Dr. Hiatus Md.

"I have you now Amateur Writer Man, for I finally know your weakness: Apathy and procrastination. And with my Apathy and procrastination ray, you will be powerless to stop me."

"You fiend! How could you possibly have figured that out!?"

**"I read your secret origins. Bitten by a radioactive Franck Miller, Amateur Writer Man, with the power to break the fourth wall, whatever that means, yada yada yada." **

"That's it! My fourth wall breaking powers! It's my only chance." Turns to camera. "You folks at home must help me! Simply write something on the space below me to help me regain my powers!"

5. Chapter 5

**As always, many thanks to HungryDemon. The only beta whose contact requirements include an Internet connection, a pentagram, black

candles and a sandwich. **

In order to appease the terrible power of the lawyers, I am legally obliged to inform you I don't own either How to Train Your Dragon nor Brave 2012. Seriously, don't mess with the lawyers; they made the cookie monster say that cookies are "a sometime snack". That is power you just don't mess with.

* * *

><p>Chapter 5<p>

With the deadline for the arrival of the Viking chief's son fast approaching, Merida felt like she was about to lose her mind. In order to keep a better handle on the situation once the Viking arrived, the three young lords had moved to the castle to keep an eye on him in case he had something nasty planned. It was an unspoken agreement between them that only two of them would go back to their home.

As fine as it sounded to have some extra security that was around that was her age, the young lords had taken the opportunity to make good on the deal they had made that awful night, and tried to win her heart.

They were nice guys really, so it wasn't actually all that awful, but they were suffocating her, she hardly had a moment alone. It had gotten to the point that she had actually started relishing her lessons with her mother, despite their mind numbing qualities, because at least she was mostly alone. When she could take no more of it, she told everyone off and went riding by herself for the first time in what felt like ages.

She rode and rode, not really paying attention to the time or where she was going. She was just glad that she could finally have a moment for herself, her horse, and no one else.

The wind in her face was exhilarating, and after feeling watched for so long, being out in the open, alone with Angus, riding to her hearth's content was so liberating. And then her best friend decided to stop for no reason that she could perceive, throwing her to the ground when her body decided to keep moving forward.

"Owwâ€| Angus!" She groaned from where she landed, her earlier foul mood returning. "Wot is wrong with you!?"

She got up and walked towards her friend with a slight limp. That fall had hurt! She leaned on Angus and tried to walk it off but he didn't budge. She tried to pull him along but he refused to move, he was scared. What could have possibly scared Angus like that?

"Who's there?" A voice called out.

Merida silently cursed, someone had found her. The voice was male and didn't sound deep enough to be from an adult. A young vassal maybe? Or a boy from a nearby village? It didn't matter. She didn't feel like having company.

She started to look around for the source of the voice, in order to dismiss its owner back to where he came from, and noted that the sky

was almost dark. Had she really lost track of so much time? She spotted the light from a campfire nearby. How could she have missed that? Was this what had Angus so nervous?

She tried to pull the horse toward the light and he pulled back almost frantically. It put her on edge.

"I know someone's there; you make a lot of noise," the voice insisted.

"A'm armed!" She warned, preparing her bow.

"That's a strange name, but I guess I shouldn't talk. Nice to meet you, Armed."

Merida got the distinct impression she was being mocked.

"Am I being robbed?" The voice asked.

"What?" The question caught her off guard.

"Are you robbing me?" The voice clarified. "Not a lot of people I know introduce themselves by brandishing weaponry. Maybe it's a local custom," it mused.

"Jus' being careful, A don' know ye," Merida justified herself. "Yer suspicious," she added for completion's sake.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, Miss Armed, but being wary is more appropriate when someone barges in on you, not when you find someone cooking dinner."

"Me name is nae Armed!"

"Well, you haven't told me your real name, yet," The voice explained.

"Maybe A donae feel like giving it to ye."

"I'm not keeping it if that's what you're worried about."

"Yer awfully cheeky fer someone being threatened." She noted.

"Well, I'm still not sure if I'm being robbed or not." Merida rolled her eyes at that, "and since your voice isn't behind me I'll be able to see you if come close, and you'll need to come close if you want to hurt me whit your knife, or sword, or whatever it is you're threatening me with."

It suddenly occurred to Merida that if she couldn't see the owner of the voice, he couldn't see her either. There was a small rustle in the direction of the voice and she warned him to stay put.

"A canae see you either, but A'm good enough with me bow that A can put an arrow in ye if ye move."

She heard a quiet muttering and immediately pulled on the string of her bow. "Who are ye talking to!?" somehow the situation was putting her on edge.

"What? Ah yes, sorry about that, I tend to talk to myself when I'm nervous. There's a weird voice threatening me, you see?"

"Ma voice is nae weird." Merida sounded incensed.

"Yet you're still nothing but a voice and a threat," the voice replied.

"An ye still haven't told me who ye are, and what yer doing here."

"To be fair, you haven't asked." There was a trace of humor in the voice."

Merida blushed, glad the stranger couldn't see her.

"I'm just a traveler passing thru," the stranger continued. "Come tomorrow you will never see me again. In fact, if you turn around and walk away, you'll not see me at all."

"That's very rude of ye." She reprimanded.

"And yet I'm still the one being threatened." He reminded her.

"Yer still suspicious." She shot back.

There was a heartfelt sigh and Merida got the impression that the boy was asking the gods for patience.

"Listen, we can be here trading jabs until Ragnarok, but that won't change the fact that you will never get over your mistrust if we don't at least _talk_ face to face. So you got two choices. You walk away, or you step out to where we can see each other."

_Ragnarok? _She mouthed silently, shrugging it off she decided. "All right," She relented. "Ye move an ye get an arrow."

"I wouldn't dream of it," was the dry response.

Merida carefully made her way towards the fire, holding her bow at the ready.

Sitting on a log staring intently at the fire was a boy; she knew no other word to describe him. He looked to be around her age, she could not judge his height because he was sitting, but he didn't strike her as being very tall. He had brown hair, one of his feet was missing; replaced by a metal contraption. He had a somewhat nondescript face and if it wasn't for his strange clothes he could have easily passed for a villager. Strangely enough, once he saw her he didn't seem weary of her, or afraid of her bow. _Is this what Angus was so worried about?_

Hiccup, for his part, was watching the bow wielding girl as she made her way to his camp, wondering if all the Highlanders were going to be that jumpy. She was wearing a long green dress that looked much too nice to belong to a simple peasant or a bandit. She had lots and lots of hair; red and curly and massive, and her face, while pretty and expressive, was somewhat round, it reminded Hiccup of a tomato.

Merida reminded herself that just because he didn't _look _dangerous, it didn't mean he wasn't. She looked at him wearily and sat across the fire from him. That way, if he tried anything she would have ample time to back off and ready her bow.

She saw him reach for a stick and grabbed her bow. He didn't acknowledge her and started poking at the fire to move the embers.

"You really should put your bow away before someone gets hurt," he commented, not looking away from the fire.

"The only one that could get hurt is ye."

The boy smiled. "Who do you think I was talking about? Violence shouldn't be your first answer, especially when the alternative is much more pleasant."

"Wot alternative?"

"A nice roaring fire for one, and maybe a bit of rabbit if you behave." He motioned to the one roasting in the fire.

"An how would A 'behave'?" She imitated his voice.

"You can tell me your name, for starters."

"Do ye really don' know who A am?" She was surprised.

"Traveler, remember?" He pointed out. "Should I? Are you a famous bard or something like that?"

"Maybe A am," She teased.

"I knew a bard once." Hiccup commented. "His name was Asuranceturix, and the poor guy couldn't sing if his life depended on it."

"Woot happened to him?" Merida was curious.

"We tied him up, put him in a merchant ship and paid the trader an enormous amount of gold to take him as far away from us as humanly possible."

"Sounds like a good deal."

"It was," Hiccup agreed. "The hard part was getting the trader to forgive us."

She let loose a laugh at that one and he laughed along, dispersing the tense atmosphere.

"What happened to yer leg?" She asked bluntly, but he only sensed curiosity in her voice.

"I had a bad fall." He answered truthfully.

"And they took off yer foot jus cause o' that?" She seemed surprised.

"It was a _very _bad fall." He gave no further details.

"An that thing on yer feet?"

Hiccup smiled, she was infinitely more pleasant now that she wasn't trying to kill him. "You like it?" He lifted his leg to show it off. "I'm an apprentice blacksmith back home, and my mentor made it for me." Putting his leg down, the metal contraption made a small noise as it touched the ground. "I don't think I'll ever be able to sneak up on anyone, but it's not bad."

She nodded, noticing his soft smile. "Me father's missing one of his feet too. Lost it fighting a huge bear!" She waved her arms to indicate the size.

"Sounds like quite the story."

The Scottish girl rolled her eyes "Yes! an he never gets tired of telling it." She told him with fond exasperation. "So. Are ye gonna tell me wot yer doing here?" She asked with a small smile.

Hiccup's face fell. "Well, you seeâ€¦ Iâ€¦"

Hiccup's answer was interrupted by the sounds of thundering hooves coming from somewhere behind Merida. She immediately turned around and readied her bow, having already dismissed Hiccup as a threat since he had already demonstrated he could not move without making a sound.

From the darkness, the silhouette of three riders could be seen, barely controlling their horses. Giving up on that they jumped off them and started advancing in the direction of the pair.

"Friends of yers?" Merida shot him a small glare.

"I was about to ask you the same thing." Hiccup didn't seem overly concerned.

"Ye should get ready to run." She advised him and tensed.

Once the light of the campfire reached them, Merida let out a breath of relief. It was the three young Lords, who readied their weapons as soon as they spotted Hiccup.

"Are we being robbed?"

Merida shushed him and addressed the young heirs, scowling at them. "Wot do ye think yer doing?" She crossed her arms imperiously.

Wee Dingwall looked to be in rare form as he brandished a long spear. "It's late, yer mother sent us."

"Well Ah'em jus fine, ye can go back now." Her temper started flaring again.

The three clans' heirs shook their heads with eerie synchronicity. "You must come with us _now _princess,-"

"Princess?"

"-to stay would be perilous." Macintosh made his sword do a few

pirouettes. It looked like he was psyching himself up for some reason.

MacGuffin said something that vaguely sounded like a warning and they all had to stop a moment to try and figure out what it was before giving up.

"You really have to move from there princess, it is unsafe." Macintosh's voice was tight.

"Wot are ye talking about?" Merida was starting to lose her patience." Turning to look at the boy to try and see what the young lords found so threatening about him, she gasped when she saw that in the darkness behind him, a dark shape started to move, a pair of bright yellow eyes lit up and narrowed. She quickly scrambled back until she was among the young lords. "Wot is that!?" She demanded.

"Dammit, Toothless, I told you to stay put." Hiccup's voice sounded rather put upon.

Said dragon answered with a soft growl. He just wasn't comfortable with so many weapons aimed at Hiccup. He extended his wings to look more menacing and blue light could be seen from the back of his throat as a warning. It looked like he had swallowed a wisp and it was trying to get out.

The three young lords looked like they were ready to pounce, not really recognizing the threat for what it was. Merida, however, went to another place entirely.

"Ye lied to me!" she pointed an accusing finger at the boy who was still sitting.

"What?" That actually seemed to catch him off guard.

"Ye were trying to trick me into letting me guard down so ye could feed me to yer beasty!"

Hiccup's jaw dropped at that one. There were so many things wrong with that sentence that he didn't know where to start. _Trying to trick her? She was the one that barged in to my camp! _"No offence, but if was trying to do that, I would have picked someone more meaty."

Merida pointed her bow at him; she could not believe he was still giving her sass.

She suddenly gave a little yelp as the strong arms of the MacGuffin's heir unexpectedly wrapped around her, lifted her up, spun her, and put her behind him and the other young lords. Fighting back both disorientation and anger at being manhandled like that, Merida peered around the husky heir and gasped when she saw what prompted his actions.

A few feet from where she was standing, she saw what could only be described as spikes made of bone sticking out of the ground, they were huge! She idly noticed that not one of them actually went too close to the place she had occupied. _A warning shot_. She realized. All further considerations stopped at the sight that followed the

spikes.

Swooping down from the sky four monstrous figures landed between them and the boy she'd been talking to. People. People!? Dismounted from the beasts and pulled out weapons.

Neither the riders nor what she now recognized as dragons looked happy with them. One of the dragons even set himself on fire, another one seemed to be drooling lava, she could guess which one of had shot the spikes at her, since more of them were standing in attention along its tail. After a split second deliberation she decided she didn't want to know what the two headed one did.

In the middle of that chaos, both Merida and Hiccup would have been surprised to know they were both thinking the exact same thing: _Why do these things always happen to me?_

* * *

><p>CLIFFHANGER!<p>

Seriously? No one guessed last ep's challenge? whatever, it's still open.

* * *

><p>We now return to the adventures of Amateur Writer Man.

"I can feel my powers slowly returning! It's time to write the end of _your_ story!"

"Really, that's it? You're a writer and that's the best one liner you could come up with?"

"_Amateur_ writer."

One scene of soul scarring violence later.

"Wow, did you see that one? His pancreas came right out his tear duct! What? We're back on?" Strikes a pose. "And so, the world is once again safe from the forces of boredom. But we must be ever vigilant, and that includes you folks at home too. Show you care on the rectangle below me and ensure that new chapters show up on time!"

"Medicâ€|!"

"Don't be a pansy. You don't even need that to live."

"You're thinking about the appendix."

"Shows what you know. I'm thinking about lunch."

This has been another adventure of: Amateur Writer Man.

6. Chapter 6

**A massive shout out to genius 7 who figured the challenge.

Although its origins lie in the very first Zelda game (man, I feel old).**

As always, many thanks to HungryDemon for being my beta. Although, well, we have to talk dude. Receiving revisions via Ouija board is very time consuming.

I don't own either How to Train Your Dragon nor Brave 2012. Do you know why? It's the Illuminati, It's always the Illuminati. But once my mustache gun is completed they will see, they will all see (everyone knows awesome mustaches are the Illuminati's only weakness).

* * *

><p>Chapter 6<p>

By the Allfather, he just wanted to eat his rabbit and go to sleep, was that so much to ask?

Knowing he was close to Dunbroch, Hiccup had decided to camp for the night and approach the castle in the morning, on foot with Toothless. Knowing that if he simply rode the dragon when the sky was darkening, they would be mistaken for enemies and attacked, he gave himself one more night before he had to deal the mess that awaited him in the castle. One of his traps caught a tasty critter while he was making a campfire, after skinning and gutting it, it made its way to the fire where it started cooking.

So far so good. By now Hiccup really should know not to tempt fate, as she has poor impulse control and she proved it when the young Viking started hearing noises from beyond the light of the campfire. It turned out to be a girl that, judging by her first words, had a penchant for violence. He told Toothless not to move or react and went about defusing the situation with his visitor.

He got the girl to show herself and noted that her clothing was much too nice to belong to someone traveling or even willing to spend a night outdoors. He only needed to bide his time. She would go home and leave him to enjoy his last night alone.

That particular plan went to an icy grave in Jotunheim with the arrival of the girl's friends and the revelation that she was the princess. The new arrivals must have noticed the dragon or thought of him as dangerous because they were putting enough hostility forth to make Toothless react. He was pretty sure he could still defuse a potentially disastrous situation; Toothless could be ridiculously cute when he wanted to and Hiccup himself was pretty harmless looking. Then the princess talked and he snarked back on reflex, causing her to threaten him with her bow once again.

Unfortunately that was the preamble to something much more troublesome as a volley of Nadder spines made their way to the ground in front of the princess. Her companions reacted instantly, pulling her to safety and preparing themselves for a fight.

_His _companions, who, by the way, _should _have been on Berk reacted just as quickly, landing between him and the Highlanders and dismounting from their dragons. Well, Hookfang threw Snotlout off of him before lighting himself up, but the result was the same.

Why do these things always happen to me?

Vikings and Scottish were having a silent stalemate while they each waited for the other side to strike first.

Wee Dingwall was trying very hard not to lose control and simply rush in and attack, because what would work well in a massive brawl would not do with so few people. He scanned every dragon and his rider carefully until he saw the two headed one and his eyes widened at the vision before him. _Perfection_.

Snotlout watched the Highlanders and could barely contain his excitement. This was what being a Viking was _all_ about. Travel to far off exotic places, meet new and exciting people, and then kill them. He didn't care that Hookfang threw him off; they were friends, friends were supposed to be rough with each other. He didn't care that they had to tail Hiccup for days and days without him noticing because Astrid was worried. He didn't even care that his fishbone of a cousin was going to marry a princess, because after all was said and done, Hiccup was finally getting out of his way, both in the village and with Astrid. All he had to do was make sure he got to where he had to go in one piece; a task that was harder than it sounded, because when Hiccup was involved, disaster was bound to happen.

The heir to the Macintosh clan felt his blood boil and knew it was more than the warrior in him that made it so. Not for the first time in his life, what he wanted to do as a man conflicted with what he needed to do as the heir to his clan. He was not just a handsome face and a sculpted body; he was a man of wealth and taste. Seeing those outsiders in their strange garb along with the escort of such exotic creatures sent his mind spinning in many different directions, not to mention that the two girls in the group were not bad to look at.

Fishlegs eyed the Highlanders nervously as he adjusted the grip on his war hammer. He knew that because of his size he would have to clash with the big Scott that had the pair of axes and looked like he knew how to use them. He did not want to fight, oh, he so very much did not want to fight, but they had been about to attack Hiccup and he had to defend his friend. _Why couldn't this sort of things be solved with a game of trivia?_

The eldest of the MacGuffin children weighted the situation in his mind. His main concern was Princess Merida's safety but he doubted she would retreat if he told her to; she was too impetuous for that. It was clear to him that their _guests_ had only reacted when they felt that the boy behind the campfire was in danger, and felt reasonably sure that if they backed off they would not pursue. Unfortunately, Macintosh would fight no matter the odds to impress the princess, and Dingwall— well, he was actually kind of surprised that Dingwall hadn't flown in to a battle rage yet. Why did he have to be the level headed one?

Ruffnut and Tuffnut had twin manic grins on their faces as they watched their opponents. Violence, this they could do. They didn't like reading and could count worth squat, but their dad's lessons about combat _did_ stick. Swords against axes, Spears against swords Axes against spears.

Merida did not let it show on her face, but she was scared. What had started as a leisurely ride to clear her head, had devolved in to a situation that could possibly get them all killed. Who would have thought that the wee little lamb he was having a conversation with had such big claws?

Why do these things always happen to me?

Astrid adjusted her grip on her battle axe while she analyzed the battleground. Two close up fighters, one mid range and a distance one with a bow. She immediately dismissed the girl; she had trained Stormfly well, and the moment the redhead made an offensive move her dragon would take care of her. She also took Hiccup's safety out of her mind, since Toothless would protect him. That only left the three warriors in front of them. The dragons would be great help, but in the middle of the fight, none of them would have the presence of mind to command them properly. She was about to tell Hiccup to use them as he saw fit when an angry shout startled her.

"By the nine realms, what are you all doing here!?" Hiccup had enough. The angry tone of the question caught everyone off guard, even Hookfang's fire winked out.

And just like that, the tense atmosphere was broken, replaced by an awkward one.

Hiccup purposefully strode to stand in between the two groups and without saying a word turned his back to the Scotts in order to address his friends. This action was taken as rude by the princess who was tempted to shoot him, just to teach him a lesson, but she saw the black dragon, staring intently at her, eyes narrowed. The three young heirs, however, gave a sigh of relief. Instead of assuming that he saw them as of no consequence, they saw that he was putting himself at their mercy, to deter any hostilities.

"What do you mean, what are you all doing here!?" Astrid snapped back without missing a beat. "We're saving your skinny ass from being shish-kabobed by those guys!"

"I was handling it."

"Really? 'Cause it looked like you were about to hacked in to little bitty pieces."

"Well, I wasn't. And you guys were just about to cause a war!"

"Well _excuse _us for coming to help a friend in danger!"

"I didn't _ask _you guys to come."

"No, _you _don't get to say that." Astrid was getting annoyed as well. "Not after we followed you all the way from Berk and all you did was stall for time as much you could. What could be so interesting about rocks that you spend half a day just staring at them and writing on your notebook? They're just rocks. I ought to smack you for that one."

"You didn't have to come, you know? I specifically told you guys to stay on Berk."

Snotlout scoffed. "Like we were gonna listen to you."

"But you're not supposed to be here!" Why couldn't they understand that this was bad?

Tuffnut shrugged. "What's the big deal anyway? If you think you were gonna be the only one to see this place you're as crazy as Ruffnut."

"Shut it, moron." Ruffnut pushed him out of the way.

"You shut it." He pushed her back. Moments later they were wrestling in the ground.

Hiccup sighed at this and turned back to the other three. "You think I want to be here? I'm going to miss Bork's week and who knows what else. We also have a lot of matters to resolve and I'm stuck here. You know I'm not doing this for fun."

Fishlegs looked at Hiccup intently. "We're no longer talking about the trip are we?"

"You guys are so stupid," Tuffnut declared from where he was pinned to the floor by his sister. "Why don't we just get rid of them and get on with our lives?"

Ruffnut smacked him, but didn't voice any disagreement.

Hiccup palmed his face.

"We are not going to do that. Just put your weapons away. We're not here to cause a war! And youâ€|" he twirled to glare at Toothless who did his best to look innocent. "Spit that out!"

Toothless turned around and fired the plasma blast somewhere behind him. The explosion that followed toppled a few trees and left a sizeable crater. He faced the skinny youth once again and gave a little draconic shrug after he saw him drop his head in defeat.

When the armed intruders arrived, Toothless had no real intention of fighting them, because it would leave Hiccup unguarded. He tried to scare them off by looking intimidating; once that didn't work, he had the bright idea of blowing up the campfire and use the chaos caused by the explosion in addition to the subsequent darkness to grab his buddy and get out of there. Driven to distraction by the arrival of his friends he kept feeding the blast without noticing, until Hiccup told him to stop it. He was just glad he could not blush like the humans did.

Massaging his temple to fight off a headache, Hiccup turned towards the surprised Highlanders who were just standing there, watching the bizarre discussion in addition to looking bug eyed at the little dragon with the big blast.

"Listen, there is nothing to be worried about. I'm supposed to be here. They, I can not stress that enough, are not." He reached into his vest and pulled out a scroll. "My name is Hiccup and I'm here to help negotiate a pact between our people."

Merida instantly recognized the name. _Oh, no!_

"These are my friends." Hiccup pointed to each one in turn. "Astrid, Fishlegs, Snotlout and the twins: Ruffnut and Tuffnut."

Instead of scoffing at the inane names, Macintosh stepped forth and made a show of twirling his sword before sheathing it in a well rehearsed move. "My name is Ian Macintosh, I am the heir of my most noble clan." He then winked at the girls and flexed his chest.

Hiccup was surprised he could not find any trace of accent in the buff Scott's voice.

"William Dingwall, heir o' me clan," The lanky teen said while staring strongly at the twins.

The next up was the burly one with the two axes, who introduced himself as well. After a few moments of uncomfortable silence, Hiccup heard Macintosh whispering to him. "Doric MacGuffin."

Hiccup nodded in thanks to the Macintosh heir. "Well met, Doric MacGuffin," he said out loud to the benefit of his friends. "And you as well, Ian Macintosh and William Dingwall," he added. "Now onlyâ€¦"

"Wait, wait, wait!" The princess looked agitated. "Ye guys have _names?_" They all looked at her like she was crazy, even Dingwall. "Why did none of ye ever told them to me?"

Macintosh shrugged. "You never asked."

Merida palmed her face.

"I'm detecting a pattern here." Hiccup commented.

"Shut up, A'em nae talking to ye," The princess snapped at him.

"Can I at least get your name?" Hiccup prodded.

Relenting, she introduced herself. "Ah'em Princess Merida of Dunbroch." She even curtsied; the scowl on her face betrayed her true emotions though.

"That's a good name, much better name than 'Armed'." He commented.

"Still nae talking to ye," She informed him.

"All right Hiccup!" Tuffnut cheered. "They already sound like they're married. You have this one on the bag, man!"

"You go girl! Clonk him good!" Ruffnut cheered as well.

"As, _entertaining _as this is," Macintosh interjected. "The Queen is suitably worried by the princess tardiness in returning homeâ€¦" He left the sentence hanging.

Hiccup nodded. "I understand. You can tell them I will arrive tomorrow morning."

"I believe it would be better if you accompany us," Ian insisted.
"That way there can be no room for misunderstandings."

"We're going too," Astrid declared.

Hiccup paled. "Oh, no you don't. You guys are going straight back to Berk. This is serious. We can't just rush on to things anymore."

Astrid huffed. "I thought not rushing into things was our problem to begin with." Hiccup winced at that one. "We're also not here on a whim," she took pity and got back on track. "We did discuss this with your dad, and he agreed. If it all had gone according to plan, you would have had never known we were here."

"Yes, we all know according to plan is not really our style. Why did my dad agree to it?" Hiccup sounded dejected.

"It's not just about you. Someone has to chart the safest way for the dragons to travel and go back with that information."

"And you couldn't have said that from the beginning, like way back at Berk? I would have listened."

"No you wouldn't," she argued. "You're as stubborn as your father."

"Well, I had to get _something _from him."

"Don't give me that crap," Astrid scoffed. "You both have more in common than you think."

"We should depart post haste." Macintosh reminded them.

Hiccup gestured behind him. "But I haven't even hadâ€¦" Looking back at the campfire he gave a sad sigh, his rabbit was little more than coal now. "We might as well leave now." He turned to Merida. "You owe me a rabbit by the way."

* * *

><p>Important announcement: Only you can prevent forest fires. What? That's not it? Oh right, I remember now. Your friendly neighborhood Lazy Stalker needs your help to make this fic more awesome than it already is. Now, I know what you're saying, more awesome? That's impossible! This fic is already reaching unsafe levels of awesome; do you want us all to catch fire? And the answer is yes, yes I do. But pyromaniac tendencies apart, I need puns, Bear puns and Dragon puns, as many as you can get me, just drop them at the comment box below.

I also need someone to help me with MacGuffin's dialogue. I don't want it to be just: MacGuffin said something, nobody understood. So if anyone out there can translate his lines in to that incomprehensible brogue he speaks in the movie, send me a PM.

* * *

><p>FF. net presents: Real Internet

heroes.

****Chorus: Real Internet heroes!****

****Today we salute _you_ Mr. Fan-fiction reviewer. ****

****Chorus: Mr. Fan-fiction reviewer!****

****Whether it be self insertions of song-fics,****

****You're the one that makes us know someone reads our
crap.****

****Chorus: I read your crap!****

****You make sure new chapter come out relatively on time, ****

****So that a fic doest die out when it shouldn't.****

****Chorus: Don't let it die!****

****Dedicating your self to a task others just ignore.****

****You can read every single fic on the net and say with pride:****

****I wasted my time on this crap.****

****Chorus: oh yea!****

****And no, I can't get it back.****

****So crack open a brand new story or chapter fiction
nerd.****

****Because we're all glad you have your eyes on our work.****

****Chorus: Read some everyday!****

7. Chapter 7

****Today is the forth of July, an important day the world over for one
fact and one fact alone. It's my birthday, you know what that
means?****

****It means welcome, to a very special birthday chapter of The price
of choice. Yay! Now join me in the most traditional of birthday
songs:****

He did the mash

He did the monster mash

The monster mash

It was a graveyard smash

He did the mash

It caught on in a flash

He did the mash

He did the monster mash

****As always, many thanks to my beta HungryDemon, who also did the mash.****

****I don't own either How to Train Your Dragon nor Brave 2012. Although if someone where to give them to me as a birthday gift, that would be awesome (wink, wink, nudge, nudge).****

* * *

><p>Chapter 7<p>

After making sure his friends would go back home and watching them fly off, Hiccup, Merida and the other suitors rode towards Castle Dunbroch. Toothless was flying low, barely above the canopy of trees, to avoid detection.

Stopping at the edge of the forest, Merida continued by herself, in order to explain the situation. Leaving Hiccup alone with the young lords. He gazed at the castle in the distance with a small smile on his face; it was the biggest building he had ever seen!

Hiccup's smile aroused Ian's curiosity; he had never met a Viking before. "What are you smiling about?"

"I'm just glad I'm not the shortest person around anymore." Hiccup threw a sidelong glance at the Dingwall heir.

"I'd be careful if I were you, he bites," the other teen recommended. "So, what's the deal with you and that blonde?" The Macintosh heir asked out the blue.

"Nothing, we're just friends." Hiccup asked truthfully, a little surprised by the casualness in the other teen's voice, a casualness that was absent from his speech back at the camp.

"That didn't look like 'just friends' to me, come on, spill it." Ian egged him on.

"We are close friends," he relented. "But it never went further. And it never will."

"How deliciously poetic. However, leaving it unresolved like that, it leaves a bad taste in the mouth." Ian commented lightly.

Hiccup tilted his head to the side. "Unresolved? No, it's resolved. We talked about it, and said what we needed to say. The issue is dead and buried."

Ian gave him a pitying look; he obviously knew nothing about women. "In any case, I doubt your friends listened to you and are really on their way back."

"No," Hiccup agreed. "They are probably watching us right now."

"It seems as if your friends don't trust you." Ian searched the

castle in the distance for some kind of activity.

"Yes, they're smart like that." Hiccup searched the night sky, as if he could find them by just looking. "But in this case, it's you guys they don't trust."

"And yet you seem not to care either way." Ian seemed intrigued.

"No offence to you guys, but I've dealt with uglier things than your lot." He scratched Toothless's head. "Besides, I'm a Viking, it's an occupational hazard."

Macintosh scowled at being called ugly, but seeing the lizard besides the skinny Viking, he conceded the point.

"I'm just bothered that I have to stay here for Thor knows how long," Hiccup confessed.

"Then why don't you go back?"

"Same reason you don't. I'm guessing." Seeing the challenging look on the Scottish teen he elaborated, "We have to do our best for the people we will eventually be responsible for. Anything else would be selfish." He ran a hand thru his hair. "Out of all of us here I imagine that the big guy over there is the only one to have any feelings for the princess at all."

Hanging around dragons so much had given Hiccup an uncanny ability to pick up nonverbal cues, which unfortunately served him little in Berk, because Vikings were not the most expressive of folks and honest to a fault. Furthermore, you didn't need to be an expert at it to pick up some very good tells of how things stood.

Ian Macintosh, whom he was currently speaking to, had seemed to have been trying impress Astrid and Ruffnut back at campfire, he made an effort to remain in their line of sight whenever possible, and struck weird poses when he thought they were looking.

William Dingwall for his part kept giving Ruffnut, and strangely enough, Tuffnut looks that were like the ones he used to give to Astrid back in the day. That brought back memories, uncomfortable ones.

Doric MacGuffin on the other hand kept his attention solely on Merida the whole time, he didn't openly stare at her though; but he kept her within arms' reach, ready to pull her back in case one of his friends or the dragons suddenly attacked. Gauging every action carefully. It was a powerful tell.

MacGuffin turned to them and said something that sounded vaguely impassionate. Hiccup and Ian looked at each other for a moment before Hiccup who had been nodding slowly, shrugged. "I got nothing."

Dingwall continued looking forward.

Macintosh shrugged back at him and returned his gaze to the castle in the distance. He had been the first one to accept the princess's proposal because, well, practically everyone loved him already, so getting the princess to fall for him would be easy. Also, because the

idea intrigued him. He had long ago accepted that his marriage would be one of political maneuvering, if not to the princess, then probably to the daughter of a chieftain or to the female heir of some minor clan. Emotions never factored in to it, despite how the tales that the bards sang; speaking of true love prevailing thru impossible odds inflamed him so. He was simply too important for that. Then someone even more important than him defied that notion, how could he not approve?

It would be a while later that he realized that nothing had really changed. Marrying the princess was still the best possible outcome for his clan and he was sure the other two realized that as well, even if he was allowed to wed by love, the only thing that changed was the game they had to win. It wasn't really fair, and if he was honest with himself, it kind of pissed him off.

XxX

Inside the castle.

The moment Merida was let inside the castle she raced to the throne room, where she knew her parents were waiting. "Mum! Dad!"

Elinor was about to rebuke Merida for her loudness when she saw the look of worry on her daughter's face. "What is it Merida? Are you fine? Where are the young lords?"

Merida tried to catch her breath before speaking. "He's here, Mum, the Viking's here!"

Fergus immediately stood. "Are ye alright? How many o' them did ye see?"

"Jus' one," she lied, not wanting to tell them that she almost caused a war again by acting on impulse. "He's at the edge o' the forest with the lords' sons."

Fergus grimaced and exchanged glances with his wife. He had doubled patrols along the coast. How could he have gotten so close without anyone noticing? "He could nae have gotten this close without help, we must find the rest of his companions."

"No!" Merida interrupted. Thinking of what would happen if they actually found the dragon riding teens. "He's nae alone Dad! That's why he's on the forest. He's got a bloody dragon with him!"

Elinor paled, remembering half forgotten conversations and putting things together. "Merida, are you sure?"

"Course A'm bloody sure!" At her mother's disapproving look, Merida apologized and lowered her head. "It was big an scaly an had wings. A don't know what else it could be Mum."

Fergus narrowed his eyes. "It will be dangerous if he stays here. We must act carefully."

Merida's eyes widened.

"We would risk offending the Vikings," Elinor reminded him. "We will bring the boy here and judge where to go from there."

"Are ye feeling fine Mum?" Merida asked. She had never thought she would see the day where her dad asked for prudence and her mother, of all people, told him to just wing it.

"The situation is delicate Merida; in order to proceed correctly we need to know as much as we can. For the time being, our best source is the chief's son. Sending him away to the village or a farm would not do us any good."

"Aye," Fergus reluctantly agreed. "'Tis best if he stays. At least for the night."

XxX

It was a contingency of guards that met them at the edge of the forest to guide them to the castle. To say it was the biggest building Hiccup had even seen would be an understatement; he could see how hordes of invading Viking would have trouble storming such a place.

They were all ushered to the throne room, where even more guards waited for them.

The Queen observed the nervous Viking as he made his way, and suppressed a gasp when she saw what could only be a dragon trailing behind him. She hoped the guards did not startle the beast in to action.

While walking in the throne room, Hiccup had the feeling that his hosts didn't trust him. With guards all around and the other three suitors at his back, the feeling was strong indeed.

In front of him, sitting on twin thrones sat the King and Queen: A massive man with curly red hair and a peg leg that no doubt looked even bigger because none of the soldiers he had seen so far reached his chest. The Queen looked regal and sophisticated; Hiccup had never seen a woman like that. Sitting at her side were a trio of red headed boys who were staring at Toothless with eyes filled with wonder, while at the King's side sat the princess, giving him a cold look.

Stopping at what he considered a good distance before the throne, Hiccup wondered who was supposed to speak first. A sidelong glance at his friend revealed that he was getting ready toâ€¦| _oh, no._
"Toothless, don't!"

Whatching Watching the Viking in front of him carefully, Fergus couldn't believe that this was a Viking's chief's son. Especially one whose title was "The Vast". _This better not be a trap_. Knowing the average Viking's girth and stature, he expected someone bigger. Except for his leg and his lizard there was nothing remarkable about the boy. Starting his greeting, his words died when he saw the dragon leap at his wife. _Treachery!_

The Queen felt terror overtake her for a moment as the beast leapt at her. Then the darndest thing happened: It stopped. The dragon halted right in front of her, gibing a few strong whiffs at the air around her before sitting on his haunches like one her husband's dogs, he gave her a big gummy smile. _He does not have any teeth_! Eyes wide

and impossibly round, looking at her expectantly. Steeling herself, she reached out and gently patted the beast's head. She got a rumbling purr in return.

Fergus let loose a booming laugh. _A fearsome beast indeed_. He started to stand when a chilling growl stopped him midway. The dragon, that until moments ago had acted and looked more a playful puppy than a vicious killer, had completely changed his appearance. Crouching low on all four legs like a cat ready to pounce, his eyes were now slitted slit and narrowed in to a frightening scowl, and he apparently had somehow grown teeth, since he was bearing a row of sharp looking ones at him. He looked every bit the apex predator that he was. _A fearsome beast indeed._

Mindful of the fact that his wife was right beside the beast and his three sons behind it, Fergus slowly sat down. As soon as he did, the dragon retook his earlier pose: sitting peacefully, eyes big and round, looking at him curiously. Fergus started to stand once again and the beast snarled at him, once again ready to pounce. He sat down and the dragon calmed down once more. The seen scene repeated itself a few more times before Hiccup decided to interfere.

"He won't let you near while you carry a weapon," He informed respectfully. "Your Majesty." He added as an afterthought, wondering if he was going to have to finish all his sentences that way from now on.

"How do ye know Ah'm carrying a weapon?" Fergus raised an eyebrow at the young Viking.

Hiccup shrugged. "I don't." He tilted his head in Toothless's direction. "He does."

Fergus nodded his head and very carefully reached to his side where he pulled out a concealed dagger and threw it behind him. He then repeated the process with a sword he carried on his back. This time when he stood up, Toothless stood still. Moving to stand in front of the dragon he scratched it behind his earflaps. Toothless gave no indication that he welcomed the treatment, but didn't reject it either.

Taking that as their cue, the triplets jumped on Toothless and started climbing all over him. Said dragon endured this stoically and gave Hiccup a look that clearly meant, 'You owe me for this.'

Gently dislodging the triplets, Toothless bounded to Hiccup's side and the Viking scratched the dragon's side to show his gratitude. "Thanks buddy," he whispered. "Warn me next time, you almost gave me a heart attack."

Toothless snorted softly in amusement.

"Well then!" Fergus all but shouted. "A believe introductions are in order. Ah'm King Fergus, an' this lovely lady by me side is me wife Queen Elinor. Ye already met me daughter princess Merida, an' those little monsters are the triples Harris, Hubert an Hamish." He pointed to each one, not really knowing if it was the correct one.

"You, A believe, are chief's Stoic's son: Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third." Hiccup nodded. "What happened to yer leg boy?"

"I had a bad fall," he answered doggedly. "I don't mean to be rude Your Majesty, but we've been traveling for days and are very tired. The princess found us when we were getting ready to go to sleep."

"Of course." The Queen nodded. "We shall continue tomorrow. I will have someone ready a stable for your dragon. Maudie will take you to your room."

"If you don't mind, I would prefer not to be separated from Toothless. I can sleep on the stable just fine." _I just want to go to sleep._

"Don't be daft lad," Fergus scolded. "It would ruin the treaty if A made ye sleep at the stables."

"I will not leave Toothless alone." Hiccup was firm in that.

"I would hate to contradict Your Highness," surprisingly, it was Ian Macintosh that talked. "But perhaps it would be unwise to separate the _fire breathing_ dragon from the one person that can control it."

"Aye." The king agreed. "Maudie! Take hem to their room."

Hiccup was guided to the room he would be staying by a heavysset woman that seemed on the verge of fainting the whole way. As soon as he entered, Toothless bounded to a corner, warmed himself a bed on the stone floor and settled down to sleep.

Hiccup unpacked his things and prepared to sleep as well. He couldn't help but feel that he'd been too hasty in sending his friends back. No doubt they were camping somewhere, since traveling at night was dangerous. One last night with friends under the stars would have been wonderful.

After a while of just laying there on the bed he sighed, he was so tired, nevertheless he could not sleep, no matter how hard he tried, so he decided to have a look at Gobber's notes. He grabbed a book and opened it on a random page:

I've been living with the Kombucha mushroom people for a few weeks now. No one is gonna believe I actually found them. Contrary to what the legends say, they're good people and they mostly just sit around all day.

Today, after some sort of trance, the elder told me that I would have to leave soon. I think he sensed that the Boneknapper is near. This is a problem. The jungle is too dense and the Kombucha use no tools or have metal of any kind, to top it off, except for my eggbeater all of my attachments were lost in the shipwreck. On hindsight, I should have been steering the boat instead of making myself an omelet. I'm gonna have to find a way sharpen that eggbeater enough for my purposes. I think that if Iâ€|

Hiccup closed the book; maybe he should give sleeping another try.

* * *

><p>I'm still waiting on those puns guys and the MacGuffin thing too.<p>

Alright, today on account of how awesome a day it is. We're going to have a more difficult challenge: Find the hidden song, tell me its name and the band that plays it and win a supper special awesome price.

Hint: It's not the Monter Mash.

* * *

><p>Hey there, you are cordially invited to the party of the century, so if you're near CENSORED come on by, there will food, drinks, music and more.

So drop by CENSORED between CENSORED and CENSORED, in beautiful down town CENSORED. See you there!

The price of admission? Some feedback on the space below.

8. Chapter 8

As always this space is reserved for an expression of gratitude towards my beta HungryDemon, keep on trucking, man.

As nobody gave them to me as a present (bummer), I still don't own either How to Train Your Dragon nor Brave 2012. Maybe next year.

* * *

><p>Chapter 8<p>

It was bleary eyed Hiccup that made his way to the dining hall for breakfast, his stomach overwriting his need for sleep. He mumbled a greeting to the royal family who were eating along with the young lords, served himself a brownish lump of meat on his plate and started eating mechanically.

The king could barely contain his mirth. "Do ye know what yer eating lad?"

"A brownish lump of meat?" Was the best answer Hiccup's brain could come up with at that moment.

"It's called haggis." Fergus answered.

"I'm eating one of your sons? That's terrible." Hiccup's tone didn't change nor did he stop eating.

"Haggis, not Hamish!" Merida informed him. She was still mad at him, but seeing him like that was very entertaining.

"What's the difference?" Hiccup didn't get it.

"One's a Scottish prince an the other's the heart, lungs an liver of a sheep boiled in its own stomach." Merida wanted to see his reaction.

"Well, they both sound delicious." He turned to the triplets. "Hey, little guy. Did you know you're named after a dish?"

Hubert, who Hiccup was talking to, pointed at Hamish, the correct triplet.

"Him too? I've never heard of a dish called Harris."

Merida palmed her face. The young lords seemed to be trying to hold in their laughter.

"Would I be correct in assuming you are still asleep Master Haddock?" The Queen asked.

"Of course not, Gobber, I filled the charcoal pit last night."

The Queen took that as a yes.

It would be a while yet before Hiccup was lucid enough to have a real conversation.

"Did ye sleep well?" Fergus's smile showed he already knew the answer.

Hiccup grimaced and stretched a little, a loud series of pops were heard, as his spine and various other bones arranged themselves where they were supposed to go. After apologizing to the Queen, who looked at him in a reproaching manner for his crude actions, he answered. "I don't know how you people sleep on those beds." He rubbed his shoulder. "They're so soft; I thought mine was going to eat me."

That had not been the answer Fergus was expecting since he had taken it upon himself to make the room as uncomfortable as possible. Picking the coldest room in the castle, he put the hardest bed he could find in it. Just because they had to put up with the Viking didn't mean they had to make him feel welcome. What he failed to take into account was that as Viking, Hiccup was used to much colder temperatures, so the room didn't even register in his mind as cold. He slept on planks of wood shaped like a bed, so the rock-like bed he was given felt feather soft to him. Ironically, if they had given him a normal bed he would have freaked out.

"Can I ask you a question?" Hiccup addressed the King.

Fergus nodded. "Go ahead, lad."

"Does everyone in your kingdom wear a dress?"

Doric was suddenly coughing uncontrollably, choking on his food while Ian started laughing fiercely at the question.

"Dress? This here's a kilt, laddie! The traditional garment of me people, an the tartan it sports, shows to everyone yer clan an yer honor!"

Hiccup nodded slowly. "So, yes?"

Fergus left eyebrow twitched. "Aye."

The Queen decided to move the conversation along. "Tell us about your home, Master Haddock."

_Master Haddock? _Hiccup shrugged it off. "You want to know about Berk? Well, Berk is twelve days north of hopeless and a few degrees south of freezing to death. It's located solidly on the Meridian of Misery. It snows nine months of the year, and hails the other three. Any food that grows there is tough, and tasteless. The people that grow there are even more so."

"If it's so awful why don't ye just leave?" Fergus suppressed a wince as soon as he finished asking the question. Of course they tried to leave. They tried to leave and settle in _his _land.

Hiccup shrugged. "Most people would leave. Not us. We're Vikings. We have... stubbornness issues. Besides, it's not that bad. We have fishing, hunting, and a charming view of the sunsets."

"One would assume you would count the fauna among the perks," Macintosh piped in.

Hiccup laughed.

XxX

After breakfast Hiccup tried to find his way back to his room. The number of twists and turns making it a little difficult for him remember the way. _Maybe I should make a map_. He did not ask for help because that would mean admitting he was lost, and he wasn't lost, just a little misplaced. _Not that I'm lost, I'm just exploring. _His exploring eventually took him to a place that would make his stay with the Scotts a lot more pleasant.

"They have a library, a big library." _Jackpot!_

It was there that the Queen found him, hours later, surrounded by books and scrolls.

"I see you found our library," she announced herself.

"This place is incredible, Your Highness." Hiccup was engrossed taking notes.

"Please, call me Elinor," she asked.

"That's not gonna happen," he told her in a distracted manner. "Not until all the people with spears stop glaring at me when I pass by them."

The Queen nodded, accepting that. "It is good to see someone in this room, here by their own will."

"They don't know what they're missing," he commented absently. "I just wish I could read any of the books here."

"You mean you can not?" The Queen was surprised.

"I only know runic," he told her. "These characters are different and the structure is a little confusing, but there are enough similarities that it won't be too difficult figuring it out. I just

need a bit of time." He gestured to some of the scrolls at his side. "These ones however, I can't make heads or tails of."

"That is because they are in Latin." The Queen informed him.

"Latin?"

The Queen's eyes lit up. "Yes, Latin is a language spoken since ancient times by the greatest minds the world has ever known. It is a language of culture, refinement and knowledge. If there is a tongue that will live to the end of time, it will be Latin, mark my words, Master Haddock."

"Ancient language of knowledgeâ€|" Hiccup considered that for a moment. Bork couldn't have been the only one to document dragons and their behaviors, which was his main reason for trying to decipher the Scottish written language. If this Latin was as important as the Queen said it was, learning it would be a worthy use of his time. On the other hand, he only had so much time: He had to take care of Toothless and study Gobber's notes on top of translating a written language in order to search for information about dragons; he also had to romance the princessâ€| somehow. So, in the end there was only one answer.

"Can you teach it to me? Your Highnessâ€|"

The Queen smiled at him. It made him feel uncomfortable.

XxX

As the days passed, Hiccup was able to get a better read on the young lords.

William Dingwall for example, was an artist, a good one at that. Not like Hiccup, whose talent at drawing was limited to making things look like what they're supposed to look. It was a skill that served him well for designing, drawing blueprints and more recently, to illustrate the dragon manual and make a few portraits of his friends. No, if anything, William was more like Bucket, in that what they made conveyed emotions, somehow. Even their expressions and general disposition was similar. However, unlike Bucket, whose train of thought could be described as a jumbled mess of half formed ideas, Hiccup had discovered that the gangly teenager was constantly rearranging things in his head; textures and colors and general compositions.

Doric MacGuffin he knew the least. Simply because he could not understand a word he said. However, from observing him, Hiccup had concluded certain facts:

He was uncomfortable doing activities not strictly physical, it seemed like he was afraid of breaking whatever he was doing.

He had feelings for the princess, as he was extra careful not to break anything in her presence and he adopted shy mannerisms when she was near.

The third thing he had discovered was that he liked to cook. During the third day of his stay in the castle, the MacGuffin heir had

barged in during breakfast carrying a tray ofâ€¦ well; he took a biscuit, cut it in half and put an egg and a slice of sausage between the two halves. From what little they'd been able to piece together from his explanation, he called them Egg MacGuffins. The triplets loved them.

Ian Macintosh, well, Ian was a strange case. At first glance he was all about appearances, competitive, arrogant and conceited. A second glance confirmed it. Yet, as soon as the area was devoid of females he was the easiest one to talk to, as he fancied himself a man of culture. Culture Hiccup didn't really get.

"Okay, check this one out. 'A magical talking bear and a runaway gypsy princess with an attitude. Together, they fight crime on the busy streets of Rome. Using questionable methods to ensure the law is upheld.' I call it 'Bearly Legal.'"

"I'm not gonna lie to you Ian. It soundsâ€¦ unique." Hiccup scratched his head.

"I borrowed from a couple of different sources, but it's mostly an original idea," Ian declared proudly.

Hiccup couldn't quite wrap his head around the concept. He knew that the tales of great men often got represented by actors or puppets, to entertain and to educate children, in fact, they themselves did that. During Bork's week, a representation of some of Bork's adventures was played for the village, with props and disguised villagers playing the roles of the dragons. He had even heard that this year they were gonna use real dragons. _Man, I would give my left foot to see that. _He looked down. _Wait a minute, I already did! And I still won't get to see it, crud. _He forcefully took his mind away from that train of thought and back to the previous one. Making stories up struck him as strange.

"The tales of heroes," Ian said, as if sensing his thoughts. "Of wars, of kings, of battles. They get changed, exaggerated, twisted with the passage of time until little remains of the original and we take fiction as fact. If that is to be their destiny, why not just make something up from the beginning? A lie that can't be mistaken for anything else, one that you can manipulate to your liking, just for the entertainment value. It's a way to unburden ourselves from the lies of the past. That is what theater is all about."

Hiccup shrugged. "If you say so."

XxX

"â€¦ and finally Omega. Omega has a numerical value of 800 and as the last letter it is usually used to denote the last, the end, or the ultimate limit of a set, in contrast to alpha, which is used to mark the beginning(1)."

Hiccup nodded and jotted down a few notes.

"After observing you these last few days," the Queen commented lightly. "I cannot help but notice that you are avoiding my daughter."

"It's to calm everyone that thinks I'm going to kidnap her at the

nearest opportunity. Me being a rough and buff Viking and all." Hiccup flexed his arms trying to show off his muscles.

"Nobody thinks you would abduct Merida, Master Haddock." The Queen assured him.

"Really? No one? That's kind of rude."

The Queen's expression let him know she did not appreciate the divergence.

Hiccup coughed nervously. "We have an agreement."

Elinor raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

"Well, it's not an agreement, agreement, in that we didn't really agree. It's more one of those unspoken agreements were we agreed toâ€¦"

The Queen interrupted him. "Please get to the point, Master Haddock, and if I hear the word 'agreement' one more time, I will smack you," she informed him with all the grace and poise of a Queen.

"You'd do that?" Hiccup wasn't so sure.

"I would order someone to do it for me." Her voice was even, but there was a trace of mischief in it.

Hiccup narrowed his eyes, trying to piece together a decent answer. "Your daughter is mad at me for some reason and seems to be willing to do anything to avoid me. For my part, I'd rather not deal with it right now." I had enough with that sort of treatment back home_.

"So, basically, you are both acting like children." The Queen concluded.

Hiccup shrugged. "I'm okay with that."

"That does not strike me as a good way to win he heart."

"You make it sound like she's a prize in a race." Seeing that his comment hurt the queen, Hiccup quickly kept talking. "I'm sure you don't mean it like that. But I'm being completely serious about this engagement. I know for a fact that you can't force people to change their opinion of you." There was sadness in Hiccup's face and voice before he literally shrugged it off. "Sure, one look at my rugged handsome features can get any woman to fall madly in love with me instantly." To prove his point he gave the Queen his best seductive face, which actually looked quite funny.

The Queen laughed good-naturedly.

"I will not become my cousin," He continued in a more serious tone. "And constantly throw myself at someone that can barely tolerate my presence. I'm sure she'll calm down eventually, when that happens I can at the very least try to be her friend. Until then, what's the point in spending time with someone if neither of you are going to enjoy the experience? That is the whole point of this isn't it? Letting her marry for love."

The Queen had nothing to say to that.

Hiccup leafed thru a book during the silence that followed, not really paying attention until an illustration stopped him cold.

The Blue Oleander.

"Your Highness, this flower. Can you tell me what it says here?" Hiccup couldn't quite keep the urgency out of his voice.

The Queen was about to scold him for such a blatant change in topic, but saw his face and knew this was important to him. "It says here that this flower was often used in ancient times by druids to create a potion that could make a man temporarily lose his mind for the purpose of communing with the spirits, but it fell out of use due to the plant being mildly toxic and poisoning the drinkers slowly, over time."

"So it can be poisonous to humans too..." Hiccup whispered.

"Excuse me?"

"Nothing, could you please tell me more?"

The queen smiled. "Of course."

XxX

Holding court along with his wife, King Fergus wished Merida or the triples where there today, to stir things a little. Fergus spared a glance at the farmer currently pleading his case and allowed his mind to wander. Two weeks had passed since the skinny Viking's arrival and he had yet to do anything nefarious. He doubted the kid had it in him to begin with, but Fergus didn't want to be complacent and lower his guard. Scanning the crowd in from of him, Fergus saw a face he recognized, one he did not wanted to see again.

"YOU!" Fergus leapt to his feet and pointed. His face showed rage. "What are ye doing here!"

* * *

><p>(1) My beta helpfully informed that Classic Latin actually uses the same alphabet as English; Greek uses alpha and omega. However since I'm too lazy and busy to do the proper research and rewrite right now, you'll have deal with it. Brave is a gigantic anachronistic stew anyway<p>

As I'm currently dealing with some family health issues, the next couple of chapter probably wont be quite on time.

No one guessed the challenge last chapter? It's not the tittle that's hidden in the chapter is part of the lirics. Ok, here's a gigantic hint: Armenians

* * *

><p>Yo, feedback keeps the juices flowing, the creator juices that is. Did you think I was talking about something else? Sheesh,

althoughâ€|

9. Chapter 9

****Insert expression of gratitude to Beta HungryDemon , here:**

>******

****Standard disclaimer disclosure between one or more franchises and
or Copywrite material.****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter 9<p>

Fergus was furious. "Wot are ye doing here!"

"We have unfinished business if you recall," A voice from within the crowd answered him, an annoying voice.

"Everyone out!" Fergus bellowed. "Not ye, ye arse! Everyone else!"

"But sire, wot about me cabbages?"

"Bring it up next time. Now get!"

As the throne room cleared of pheasants a lone figure remained. Dressed in a grey shirt and a kilt with the colors of the Dunbroch clan, Knifenut Thorston smiled at the monarchs like the cat that ate the canary.

"How the bloody hell did ye get in here?"

Knifenut posed with his kilt. "Thru the front door. There are advantages to not having an average Viking physique." He twirled.

"Very clever." Fergus's tone indicated his words were not a compliment.

"They don't call me The Cunning for nothing." He pulled a pair of pants out of a satchel at his side. "Do you mind? It's drafty in here."

While Fergus visibly restrained himself from strangling the Viking, Elinor decided to move things along. "And to what do we owe the _pleasure _of your visit?"

"Well, last time we met, the peace talks where cut short because ofâ€| schedule problems. I've been sent to continue where we left off."

"How thoughtful." The Queen deadpanned.

Knifenut suddenly started looking around. "If you'll excuse me for just a second." He gave a sharp whistle and a small dragon appeared, it flew from somewhere and landed on his head.

Both Monarchs were surprised at seeing the dragon, it was the size of a cat with a serpentine like body, topped with fleshy spikes, a round horned head that seemed almost too big for such a slender neck, a pair of bat like wings and four clawed little legs completed the ensemble. It was a reddish Terrible Terror.

Knifnut sighed in annoyance. "Go find Hiccup, go!" The dragon left just as quickly as he appeared. "Now then, where were we?"

"How did ye get here?" Fergus tone was all business.

"We went thru this already, I used the door."

"Ye now what A mean!" Fergus snapped. "Answer the question, how did ye get here?"

"Oh, that. It's simple: I hitched a ride with my kids."

XxX

Two weeks had passed and Hiccup thought he was doing pretty well. The guards tended to ignore him now, instead of glaring at him. He was advancing at a good pace in his classes with the Queen, he was on somewhat friendly terms with his rivals and his relationship with the princess had moved from her outright ignoring him to her giving him short pointed answers. Progress!

He was just coming back from his morning flight with Toothless when he spotted a sizeable group of people outside the castle walls, close to the cliff. A group that included princess Merida and the three young lords. Landing nearby, Hiccup went to investigate. "Hey guys, what's happening?"

Surprisingly, it was William who answered. "Two headed dragon from before, napping over there." The Dingwall heir kept turning his head, searching for something.

"Two headsâ€¦" Hiccup made his way to the front of the crowd, where he saw a Hideous Zippleback happily catching some Z's "Barf? Belch? What are you doing here? Wait, if you're here that means thatâ€¦"

"Surprise!" Twin voices greeted him as Ruffnut and Tuffnut each grabbed one of his arms and started dragging him.

"Please tell me you're not here, just because you were bored," Hiccup pleaded.

"No way, man," Tuffnut answered him. "We're here with dad on business."

Ruffnut nodded. "Besides, Astrid would have our head if we just left."

"And not in a good way," Tuffnut piped in. "She's been totally harsh since we came back, been doing all kinds of drills."

"But now that we're here, we are gonna have lots of fun." Ruffnut's voice became husky.

Hiccup was afraid to ask. "What kind of fun?" He did it anyway, noting they were getting awfully close to the cliff.

"Guess," Tuffnut told him, and then they both threw him off the cliff.

"You guys suuuuê|" SPLASH!

"That was fun," Ruffnut said, ignoring the horrified looks sent their way.

"Let's go then," Tuffnut told her.

"Yeah!" They both head butted each other, hard, the clang of their helmets clashing together ringed loudly. Then they jumped.

Dingwall jumped after them.

XxX

Knifnut wandered thru the castle after the meeting was finished, trying to find out how he got lost. _Didn't I have like a hundred guards trailing me? _Having ducked in a room to change into some proper clothes, he found himself completely alone and with no idea of where to go. _Maybe I should have Hiccup draw me a map? "_Lost in thought, he almost didn't saw the trio of redheads blocking his path with determined expressions on their faces.

"I see that this castle has fierce protectors. I shall thread carefully."

The triplets nodded and puffed their chests, as if to say 'see that you do.'

Knifnut smiled. "You kids want to see something neat?" He extended his left arm, palm up and the triplets could see something slithering along his arm and exit thru his sleeve, before coiling around his wrist. Knifnut scratched the top of his head and the creature hissed in a way that could only be described as contentment. "This little fellow is a Slitherfang, and even if it looks like a snake, it's actually a dragon."

As if to prove the point, the little critter extended a pair of bat like wings it had folded against his body.

"It's not the biggest, or able to produce fire like the other dragons." The Slitherfang gave an annoyed hiss. "But that doesn't make them any less dangerous. They can make a smoke screen to conceal their movements, and their venom contains a powerful paralytic they use to hunt. These little creature hunt in packs, you know? When they find their prey, they fill the area with smoke to confuse him, then one of them creeps close and bites it. Once the prey is paralyzed, the rest of the pack comes, and they all have a delicious and _very _fresh lunch."

"If you are trying to scare my children," the Queen intoned from behind Knifnut, "You are going to do better than that."

The small serpent like dragon was startled by the voice and quickly dove back into the sleeve. Its master, however, turned to face the

Queen with a big and somewhat fake smile on his face.

"I suppose being eaten alive just doesn't have the same shock value it did back in my time." He sighed. "Regardless, I'm not trying to scare them. I'm giving them a piece of advice that has served me well throughout my life." He held the triplets gaze. "Just because you're tiny doesn't mean you're not deadly. You have to be careful, though, because what it does mean is that you are easier to squish."

A fair amount of steel appeared on the in the Queen's voice. "Are you threatening my children?"

Knifenut blinked. "I was talking about me, actually. I don't know if you've seen a lot of Vikings, but I'm not exactly up to par with my brethren."

"I make it a habit not to see _any _Vikings," The Queen told him icily.

Knifenut smiled. "A wise and healthy lifestyle choice if I may say so. But back to my point, I'm actually rather fond of children. They're smarter than people give them credit for. The perfect example is that they always turn tail and run when they see us, instead of dying in a futile attempt to defend their meager belongings. Run and live, fight and die, that's what I always say. It's that simple."

"How merciful of you, however, I doubt your victims would see it that way." The disgust in Elinor's voice was palpable.

Knifenut shrugged nonchalantly. "They should, they'd live longer. It's nothing personal on our part."

"It must be easy to say that when you don'tâ€|"

"When you don't what?" Knifenut snapped at the Queen, startling her. "Don't know what it's like?" His voice became a sneer, his face a mask of hatred. "Did you see Hiccup's scaly friend? We were in constant battle with those hellish creatures for three hundred bloody years! Can you even imagine what that is like? Once or twice a month they would come for our food. What chance where we given to run away? Where would you even run in an island? We were burned and trampled and gored and maimed. We died and hungered because of them, yet now we live side by side. Do you think that would be possible if there was hate between us? It was nothing personal for the dragons, and to hate them for it would be just as stupid as if a deer hated the arrow that killed it."

The Queen was stunned. "Would you have escaped if given the choice?"

Knifenut's deranged smile gave her the answer she needed. _Of course not, to a Viking there is no greater joy than fighting to death. _He visibly composed himself. "If you'll excuse me, I have to make sure my kids don't burn down your kingdom."

XxX

On a nearby beach, four teenagers lay panting on the ground, having narrowly escaped death.

William was on his hands and knees, catching his breath. He tried to stand up, but his shaky legs wouldn't let him. That had been the most intense experience of his life! There had been no time for contemplation or emotion, rage, fear, doubt, any of those could have gotten him killed; smashed against the side of the cliff or swallowed by the merciless might of the Loch Ness. A fight between man and the elements with only his will and determination on his side, he wanted to run to the castle and put his excitement at the experience on a canvas, but still lacked the strength to move.

"We almost died!" Tuffnut cheered between gulps of air. "That was awesome!"

"Whana go again?" Ruffnut asked.

"Na, I'm still too tired."

Ruffnut snorted. "Men."

Hiccup was laying face down on the sand; he was so tired he couldn't even manage the strength to turn around, or to care about the strange crooning he had heard while underwater. "Have I ever told you guys how much I hate you?" Toothless was gently prodding his side with his head.

"Yeah, right." Tuffnut didn't buy it. "I bet this is the first fun thing you've done since getting here."

Hiccup groaned, but said nothing. They were right. He had been taking it easy since he arrived, and as terrifying as the drop and the swim were, it was also the most fun he had in weeks. Not that he would ever admit it.

Ruffnut grinned. "Speaking of fun, are you plowing the princess yet?"

"A'hem standing right here, ye know!" Merida's face was red.

And indeed she was, as soon as they saw the direction in which they where swimming she took off running towards the beach along with Ian and Doric.

"You guys remember princess Merida, right?" Hiccup asked.

"No."

"Nope."

"Nae."

"Yer trying to court me, ye jackass," she scolded Dingwall. "How can ye not remember me?"

"Don't be too hard on the boy; from the looks of it, someone dropped him on his head when he was little," A voice behind her spoke.

Merida turned around to find a wiry Viking standing behind them.

_What? _She hadn't noticed him at all!

"Are you guys having fun?" The stranger asked.

"You bet, Dad, we just went for a swim." Tuffnut answered him.

"I can see that, you could have waited for your old man, you know?"

Ruffnut scoffed at that. "As if, you said you where gonna be in the castle _all _day."

Knifnut nodded. "That I did. However, it appears that the clan heads must be present for some reason. So until they get here I'm stuck. Then I thought, now's a good time for that camping trip I owe my kids."

Ruff and Tuff's faces lit up immediately. Hiccup had never seen the twins so happy before, their faces didn't sport their traditional mean smirk or a leer or grins, but full blown happy smiles. "You mean it?" They chorused, not even noticing they were mirroring each other.

"Of course I do," he assured them. "I just have to take care of something really quick and we'll leave as soon as you're ready." Knifnut started searching the surroundings with his gaze. "Where is that blasted lizard? I sent it to find Hiccup ages ago." He seemed displeased.

Said blasted lizard chose that moment to appear, landing on Knifnut's head. "I hate this thing so much." His voice was calm and resigned.

"Why did you guys brought a Terrible Terror here?" Hiccup was curious.

"You can blame your pal Ingerman for that one," Knifnut answered him. "He trained it to deliver messages, so we're showing him the way. I just wished he had picked a less annoying one."

The Terror was gnawing one of the horns of his helmet, as if to prove the point.

Hiccup was very surprised at that. "That's brilliant! He taught a Terror to act likeâ€|"

"Like a bloody carrier pigeon!" Merida finished for him. "Who uses dragons instead of pigeons? Why would you even want to use dragons instead of pigeons?"

Hiccup had finally managed a semi sitting position. "Well, to be fair, I've never actually seen pigeons on Berk."

"I have," Knifnut commented.

"May I inquire as to their fate?" Ian asked.

It was Tuffnut that answered him. "The dragons ate them."

"Viking promotion at its finest." Ruffnut nodded sagely.

"At least they're working off their meal," commented Hiccup, who started laughing at the absurdity of the situation.

Knifnut started chuckling. "Let that be a lesson to you kids, there's no such thing as a free meal." He burst out laughing too.

After that, all four Vikings took turns trying to outdo each other with puns.

"I guess their check's in the mail."

"We're really pushing the envelope on that one."

"We'll have to feed it well or he'll become mail-nourished."

Merida just stood there watching the Vikings laugh and trade puns and figured that making sure her 'suitsors' were alive was about the extent of her obligation to them. She could not help voicing her opinion, though. "Yer all insane."

Knifnut wiped a tear from his eyes. "Sanity was breed out of Berk about four generations ago."

Hiccup thought about that for a second. "I'm surprised it lasted that long." That started a new bout of laughter.

Merida turned her head and started to leave. She had walked at most ten paces when something landed at the top of her head. She stood stock still. "It's in me head ain't it?"

Doric and Ian nodded, William wasn't paying the slightest bit of attention.

She started reaching to pluck the little lizard off her when Knifnut's voice stopped her. "I wouldn't do that if I were you. Terrible Terrors while not overly dangerous by themselves, they _can_ breathe fire and have enough snapping power to bite your finger clean off." He shrugged. "Why do you think I let this flying pest gnaw at my helmet?"

Hiccup couldn't remember the last time he had laughed so hard or so long. Cold, wet and tired as he was, the news that he would be able to send letters and receive news from Berk cheered him up immensely. So much in fact, that he didn't mind one bit when Doric picked him up by the back of his shirt to speak with him face to face. Toothless didn't react, so there was no hostility in the act.

The MacGuffin heir spoke to him, and while Hiccup didn't understand a word the burly Scott said, he did get the gist of what he was saying: 'Go help the princess.'

"Of course I'll help her, don't worry. If Fishlegs trained that Terror, he won't react badly unless he feels threatened, so don't pull out any weapons and the princess will be all right."

Doric nodded and carried Hiccup towards Merida, feeling a little better already.

"Come on, little red." Hiccup offered his shoulder. "Why don't you climb off the pretty princess and we'll go find a nice juicy fish?"

The Terror made a whirring sound and tried to take a more comfortable position on the princess's head. Merida felt it move but not leave. "Wot is it doing?"

"It looks like nesting to me," Hiccup answered.

"Yer kidding meâ€|" Merida was not amused.

Hiccup smiled. "A little bit. A dragon would never really nest near other living beings. They nest on bare rocks near water, because their eggs explode when they hatch."

Merida paled at that.

Seeing that he was scaring her instead of calming her down, Hiccup grabbed her hands and looked her straight in the eyes. "You are not in any danger, understand?"

She nodded.

Hiccup turned to face the young lords. "Does anyone have something shiny on them?" Ian gave him a small sheet of silver, polished to a mirror shine. Hiccup took it and showed it to the dragon, who immediately leap at it, Hiccup caught the Terror in mid leap and after a few scratches it was a puddle in his arms.

"He's not really a bad guy, you see?" Hiccup made Merida hold the little dragon and told her where to scratch it, soon, she had a purring dragon on her arms and a smiling Viking at her side. "Now you're his friend," he told her. "And a dragon would never hurt his friends. Right, Toothless?"

Toothless made a sound and let his tongue hang out of his mouth. "That means yes," Hiccup assured her. "You guy should go back to the castle and give him a fish, I'll catch up later." Merida nodded and the Scotts left. Turning back to his fellow Vikings, Hiccup found them gone already. "Guess it's just you and me." He smiled at a loud voice in the distance.

"Bloody heck, it's in me head again!"

Taking a step Hiccup winced as pain shot thru his leg, Toothless was at his side in an instant, helping him stand. "Looks like walking is not a good idea right now, can you give me lift bud?"

* * *

><p>Sweet mama jamma! Taking care of someone 24/7 is tough, taking care of several people 24/7 is freaking exhausting.

To make up for the schedule slips next chapter will be extra long (no pun intended.) so make sure to look out for that.

* * *

><p>Standard plea for feedback!

10. Chapter 10

****Kudos to my beta HungryDemon who's speedy work allowed me to post the chapter on time.****

****Listen to yourself, man. ****_My_**** beta. You can't ****_own_**** a beta, man; they're one of God's creatures, manâ€| or in this case, the Devil's creatures seeing as we're talking about a Demonâ€| wow, shinyâ€| the point is you can't own a beta any more than you can own either How to Train Your Dragon nor Brave 2012, though that one is because you're poor, and by you I mean me, cause we are one, man.****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter 10<p>

Three days passed before the three Lords arrived at Dunbroch castle, unlike the last time they visited, they arrived on horseback, accompanied by no more than five men each. That didn't stop them from having a race to see who got to the castle first.

Hiccup was introduced to the Lords, who immediately ignored him in favor of bickering with each other. That changed late in the afternoon, when the twins' Zippleback landed in the middle of the castle's courtyard and its three passengers built a campfire, completely ignoring the guards, servants, and miscellaneous onlookers.

"Should we invite them in?" Elinor looked unsure on how to proceed.

Hiccup shook his head "Na, we should just let them finish their camping trip. The twins don't see their dad a lot because he's usually out of the villageâ€|"

"Raiding? Pillaging?" The Queen's tone made it clear that she already knew the answer.

Hiccup gave her a sheepish look. "Well, yeah."

"They stand for a pickle of leverage those beasties," Lord Dingwall grumbled. "Yer telling me they're not all wee little critters like the fellow camping on the princess's noggin?"

Hiccup shook his head. "Dragons come in all sizes, from really small to really big."

"What would be the biggest dragon you've ever seen?" Lord MacGuffin asked in his deep rumbling voice.

Hiccup suppressed a shudder as he remembered staying barely ahead of a sea of fire. "I wouldn't know how else to describe it, other than really, really big," he lied.

"And where is _yer _dragon, boy?" Lord Macintosh gave him a suspicious look.

"Toothless, my dragon that is, is having a nap in my room."

"Yer dragon has no teeth?" Lord Macintosh's look went from suspicious to confused.

Fergus laughed at that. "The beast has teeth alright, he just likes playing possum." The King grabbed one of Hiccup's shoulders and led him away not too subtly.

"Can I help you, your Majesty?" Hiccup asked when once they were out of earshot.

"Yer limping."

"Excuse me?"

"Yer limping."

Hiccup shrugged. "Well, I've been having a bit of pain once in a while, nothing really seriousâ€¦"

"Yer outgrowing yer leg," Fergus interrupted. "Ye should get a new one soon." He walked away.

XxX

Next morning the Scotts bore witness to a peculiar sight as they investigated the sounds of combat originating from the courtyard.

Knifnut stood in a relaxed position while Ruffnut and Tuffnut circled him, each wielding a double ended spear. As soon as Ruffnut was out of his peripheral vision, Tuffnut made a feint to distract his father; instead of keeping his attention on his son, Knifnut half turned to avoid a spear thrust from Ruffnut. "You still make noise," he admonished as he closed in and floored her with a clothesline.

Ruffnut rolled out of a stomp that would have caved her face in and barely avoided a second; a third one did not come because her brother intervened.

Seeing Knifnut's concentrating on his sister as an opportunity, Tuffnut charged at his father with his spear.

The older Viking saw it, though; he stepped to the side and met his son's lunge with a kick to the chest that pushed him backwards, grabbing the shaft of the spear Knifnut reeled his son back in to give him a head but that dropped him to the ground.

He gave Ruffnut a kick to keep her from getting up and retreated a small distance to give them some breathing air. "You are one!" He scolded. "Just like your dragon, you may _look _separate but you're not. Concentrate, coordinate."

The twins got up slowly and adopted a more hunched over posture; the matching look on their faces could only be described as vindictive. It made Knifnut smile. "Let's go."

The spectacle of the older Viking beating the snot out of his

children gathered quite the audience, including the royal family and the lords with their son's, though they all stayed closer to the castle, a decision that proved wise when they all started throwing knives and spears and axes at each other.

Lord Dingwall had a firm grasp on his son's shoulder to prevent him from going in to rage and joining the fray. "Look at the mugs of them two, they be as happy as a pig in a sty."

"It does not matter if they enjoy it; I still find it barbaric." Elinor couldn't suppress a wince as Knifnut backhanded his daughter, making her spin as she fell. As lively and adventurous as Merida was, her husband treated her like she was made of glass, even as he trained her to fight with a sword. Not wanting to see anymore of the violent spectacle, the Queen went back inside and found herself face to face with a sleepy looking Hiccup, lost in thought. "Late night reading again, Master Haddock?"

Hiccup nodded. "No, sir. It's just that I was reading until late last night and I couldn't get much sleep."

Elinor shook her head fondly. "Is that so? Then why are you awake so early?"

"I need a quick snack before me and Toothless go and keep the twins distracted."

The Queen stiffened at his words. "I do not believe you should hurry for your friends' sake, at the moment they are quite preoccupied being beaten black and blue by their father."

"They are? That's strange," Hiccup mused.

"Is it?"

"Yes, it's very hard to get the twins to wake up so early in the morning."

Elinor fought the urge to palm her head. "Come along Master Haddock, the servants should have finished setting up breakfast by now."

"Yes, Your Highness. You know, I've always wonderedâ€¦ Why do always have salmon for breakfast?"

"The same reason my dessert is always berries and honey, Master Haddock." Elinor answered cryptically.

"Is it so King Fergus won't swipe them?"

"That is one of the reasons." She admitted.

XxX

After a quick breakfast, Hiccup rushed to the courtyard where Knifnut and the twins had just finished their training session. Ruffnut was on her hands and knees panting with exhaustion while Tuffnut was flat on his back, his father's foot on his chest keeping him pinned there.

"Morning guys, are you done? You're barely bleeding at all."

"Dad said we needed to take it easy because there are too many people watching," said Tuffnut from his position on the ground.

"Exactly, the Scotts think of us as savages for some reason." Knifnut idly stomped Tuffnut in the chest making him spasm and cough.

"I honestly cannot imagine why." Hiccup deadpanned.

"Some people are just weird, we shouldn't worry about it." Ruffnut got to her feet and spit a gob of blood to the side, wiping her mouth afterwards with her bracers.

The elder Thorston shook his head and started walking away. "I have to get ready for work, have fun kids."

"Bye, Dad!" Ruff and Tuff chorused, before turning their attention to Hiccup.

"So, how was the camping trip?" Hiccup was curious.

"It was awesome, man. Dad taught us how to kill a boar with nothing but a pocket knife and a toothpick; also, Ruffnut almost got gored."

Ruffnut looked incredibly cheerful at that.

"That's great, on one of my last hunting trips with dad he tried to teach me how to kill a boar by using my head." Hiccup frowned at the memory.

"You mean, like think it to death?"

Hiccup grimaced. "Not exactly."

Flashback

An eight-year-old Hiccup watched incredulously as his father wrestled with a boar.

"What you have to remember is that once you grab a hold of its tusks you have to use strength and leverage to keep the beast from moving." Stoick gave a yank and forced the boar on its knees. "Once you got it in to position, you just—" Wham. "Have to use," Wham, squeal. "Precise." Wham. "Head butts." Wham. "right between the eyes." Wham, crunch, wham.

Stoick stood up, satisfied the boar was dead and turned to face his son, face dribbling with the animal's blood. "Now that's what I call using your head." He laughed, not noticing Hiccup's sickly green palor. "If you angle your head you can use your helmet, but they usually get dented and Gobber gets annoyed, you'll never hear the end of it." Hearing the bushes nearby rustle, Stoick addressed his son. "That's probably his friend, and he's gonna be mad. So it looks like it's your turn now."

Sure enough, a boar emerged from the bushes, saw his friend and charged at the most appropriate target for its rage, the little one

(1).

Hiccup was not thrilled. "Oh greatâ€¦"

End flashback.

"So, what's the plan for today?" Ruffnut kicked her downed brother, trying to get him to get up.

"We should go to the lake so the dragons can get some food, Toothless is anxious to fly with friends too, so there's that."

Tuffnut got up and tackled his sister. "Sounds good, there's this place nearby just crawling with fish."

Hiccup nodded and sat down to wait until the twins finished fighting.

XxX

Inside to castle Elinor explained to her daughter what her plan was for the next few days. Needless to say, Merida was not happy.

"â€¦first ye keep me locked in here fer three days an now yer sending camping with them jockers fer who knows how long?"

"Of course not," Elinor assured her. "Your brothers are going as well."

"Mum!"

"It will be a good opportunity to know those boys on a different setting. They could be your friends and you are not giving them the chance."

Merida started pacing around. "They could but they don' wont too, they jus' care about the marriage, an so do ye."

"Merida!" Elinor admonished. "We went thru this already. You will not wed until you feel you are ready."

"Ye say that, but ye keep pushing me!"

"Because you will never be ready if you do not at least try to be." Impatience crept on the Queen's tone.

"Try? Wot do ye want from me!?"

"I want you to take this more seriously!"

"Uhg!" Merida stomped once and walked off fuming; only stopping when a voice startled her out of her thoughts.

"Trouble with the folks?"

Merida turned around to find the man she saw at the beach a few days ago leaning casually against a wall.

"Wot's it to ye?"

The Viking put up his arms in a placating manner. "Simmer down lady; I'm just making an observation. I didn't have that great of a relationship with my father, so I know how annoying parents can be."

"An I suppose yer gonna tell me to patch tings up because she jus' wants wot's best fer me?" Merida crossed her arms. She already planned to apologize to her mother, she knew she overreacted, and a stranger telling her was just rubbing salt on the wound.

Knifnut shrugged. "Not really, these sorts of things have a way of working themselves out one way or another."

"An how did things worked out with ye and yer dad?" Merida challenged him.

"I stabbed that bastard in the back forty seven times." Knifnut closed his eyes, smiling at one of his fondest memories. "A man once told me that the best way to deal with a problem was to just cut down to the heart of the matter. What I've found out is that it's more of a stabbing motion." When he opened his eyes again Merida was nowhere to be found.

XxX

Hiccup and the twins were standing at the edge of the Loch watching their dragons mock fighting and splashing each other.

"So, anything interesting happening while I'm here?"

Tuffnut shrugged. "Not really. Aside from all the stuff Astrid's making us do, it's been pretty boring. Even Mildew's been laying low."

Ruffnut nodded. "Yeah, she's been working us pretty hard."

That worried Hiccup; one of Astrid's more admirable traits was the way she trained and prepared herself, and if that same attitude bled over to the academy training it could lead to possible misinterpretation.

Despite keeping the dragons a secret from the Berserkers, there existed other tribes; friendly tribes which shared their knowledge that dragons are friendly and can be tamed. The actual knowledge of how to tame and train the dragons belonged only to the Hairy Hooligan tribe, but the fact that dragons were no longer a threat as long as one left them alone they tried to pass along.

Hiccup narrowed his eyes, if someone from a friendly tribe where to witness Astrid's training regimen applied to an organized group and blab about it, it would add weight to Dagur's claims that they were building an army of dragons.

Problems everywhere, yay! The question is, what to do about it?

XxX

After much thinking and pacing, Merida found her mother working on a

tapestry. "The campin's nae about me an the boys, is it?" She looked unusually subdued.

Elinor stopped working and held her daughter close, running one hand soothingly down her hair. "Once you grow older and start to fully settle in to your role as Queen, you will learn that rarely can an action, word or situation, claim a single motivation as its source. It will be your job to determine all the possible motives and repercussions of your actions and the actions of those around you."

Hugging Merida as she was, Elinor missed the look of dismay on her daughter's face. "Of course I want you to get along with the boys and I hope that this trip helps you in that regard. However, without their heirs and the majority of their troops within shouting distance; the Lords will not have the same commitment to saving face that they normally would. That should make them more manageable. The same with that Viking, without his children, Hiccup and the dragons, he should be easier to handle." _I hope._

Letting go of Merida, Elinor looked deep in to her eyes to emphasize the seriousness of her next remark. "But more important than all that, I do not want you anywhere near that horrible man." She let that sink in for a moment before continuing in a softer more teasing tone. "And if I have to send my daughter on a nice vacation with four strapping young men who wish to earn her favor, so be it."

"Mum." Merida blushed lightly.

"Do not be a bore dear; I was young once too. Remember that there is nothing wrong with looking and a little teasing, even you have to admit that they are not bad looking."

"Mum!"

"Besides, you do not have to marry any of them, I assure you. There are plenty of minor clans around: The MacGyvers, the McClanes, the MacDonalds, the Macleods, the Macbethsâ€| on second thought we should probably let the Macbeth's out of this (2)."

"We are nae having this conversation!" Merida was mortified.

"Help me with this tapestry then. Since you will spend the next days running around the countryside while your mother deals with boring politics; it is the least you can do."

XxX

Soon after the Viking teens returned from the Loch they were informed them that they would all be leaving on a trip during the negotiations, much to Hiccup's relief; he was not looking forward to guarding the twins in a castle full of expensive items. Not that he would ever tell them as they could take it as a compliment, an insult or a challenge; and for the life of him, Hiccup was not sure which one would be worse.

As the group moved towards the front gate of the castle, Hiccup watched the proceedings with confusion. "Are we moving to another country?"

Tuffnut shrugged. "Don't look at us, you're the smart one."

"You will be traveling along with royalty, Master Haddock. Some needs must be satisfied in the best possible way no matter the situation," the Queen told him.

"But isn't roughing it the whole point of camping? It looks like half the castle is coming with us."

Ian wrapped an arm around Hiccup's shoulder in a friendly manner. "Do not burden yourself with such thoughts my friend. They come along to take care of the more boorish tasks, leaving us with more time to engage in moreâ€¦" He glanced at some of the females. "Pleasurable pursuits."

After everyone had said their goodbyes and they departed; The Monarchs, the Lords and Knifnut Thorston watched from the castle gate as the rather sizable group shrunk in the distance.

Fergus looked at Knifnut curiously. "Yer about to enter negotiations in unfriendly surroundings with people who want ye dead, an ye send away all possible forms of back up or escape. Yer a reckless man."

"Says the man that took his wife to a Viking raid," Backstab shot back.

"Peace talks, remember?" Fergus mock admonished.

"TouchÃ© your Majesty, touchÃ©."

XxX

The caravan rode for a good portion of the day, until they reached the first leg of their journey; a stretch of forest usually used by the royal family for their camping trips.

Hiccup found himself edging closer to the forest along with Toothless as a multitude of servants went about preparing the camp, he was almost there when he was intercepted by the princess of all people.

"Can A talk to ye for a moment?" She seemed unsure of something which surprised Hiccup.

"Sure, what can I do for you, Princess?"

"Listen, A know A haven't been the easiest person to deal with since ye got here anâ€¦" Merida trailed off when Hiccup turned to look at his dragon when the beast unexpectedly tensed; it was almost as if it sensed something.

"Toothless? Are you okay?"

Toothless sniffed around a few times and growled before running off toward the forest.

"What are youâ€¦?" He turned to the princess. "Hold on to that thought for a second; I'll be right back. Toothless, get back here!" He took off too.

Merida gave an annoyed sigh. "An now he ignores me!" She followed them.

Hiccup chased his dragon as fast as he could; which is to say not very fast at all, since the princess caught up to him in no time. "Where are ye going?"

"I have no idea."

When they finally caught up with Toothless, he was standing in the middle of a great circle made of standing stones. "What's going on bud? This is weird even for you." They were both stunned when the Night Fury started roaring loudly, as if threatening something only he could see. Hiccup snapped out of it first.

"Stop that! Those look like they're important. The Scotts are going to get mad at us."

"Wot is he doing!?" Merida had finally snapped out of her stupor.

"He is staking a claim deary." An old woman walked from behind one of the stone pillars, she was using a rope to drag log behind her. "It's been a long time since I've last seen an Areal, oh that brings me back." She sighed wistfully.

Merida's eyes were round as saucers. "Ye!" She pointed at her. "Yer that!"

"Woodcarver!" Snapped the tiny woman; pointing at the log she was dragging.

"Aerials?" Hiccup sounded perplexed. "You mean Toothless?"

"Yes!" She perked up. "An old name for an old race."

"Ye turned me Mum in to a bear!"

"I did no such thing!" The old woodcarver looked indignant. "Stupid unsatisfied customers, always complaining about getting _exactly _what they asked for," she muttered, "and you blew up my house! I know it was you!"

Hiccup stepped in before the conversation veered too much off topic. "What exactly would that mean? Staking a claim."

"Yes, a claim." She forgot all about her house. "The Aerials are dragons that is, are the natural counterparts to many things we consider myth. They serve to keep many otherworldly forces at bay. People on the olden days used to believe that they guided the souls of the deceased beyond the veil that separates this world from the next, protecting them from those that would prey on them."

Hiccup nodded. "That makes sense."

"Don' tell me ye believed that." Merida wasn't so sure.

He shrugged. "Dragons have a very strong protective instinct, so I can see how people would think that. As for the guiding the dead

thingâ€¦ I don't know, I've never been dead before, been close a couple of times tough."

The old woodcarver cackled. "I haven't died either, so I can't tell you if that one's true. But they do keep the magical at bay; your little friend's show, is him using the stone circle to tell those that would listen to leave _you _alone."

"Well, Gobber's gonna be happy trolls won't steal my socks." Hiccup suddenly realized something. "I'm sorry, I never introduced myself; my name is Hiccup. Miss?"

"Call me Matty, its short for Matoya." She gave Hiccup an owlsh look. "I like you boy; you're polite. Did you know that Red over there never even asked my name?"

"I've noticed that about her. Do you need help with that log?"

"Of course I do, these old bones aren't as strong as they used too."

"Hey buddy, are you finished? Can you give us a hand?"

Toothless strutted over to them with a smug expression on his draconic face and snatched the rope with his mouth.

"This way, sonny boy." Matty started walking away.

"So, what else can you tell me about dragons?"

"They keep the Fey's pranks from getting too out of hand, and alsoâ€¦"

Merida stood there stunned as boy, dragon, witch and log walked away, not paying her the slightest bit of attention. She huffed and followed them; if Viking boy got himself turned in to a bear they were going to blame her, she was sure.

A few hours later Toothless, Hiccup and an annoyed Merida made their way back to the camp.

"What a nice old lady, and such low prices too." Hiccup held up a wooden figurine of a bear wearing an apron and hammering away at an anvil. "Gobber will like this one; it will liven up the forge."

"Jus' wait till she turns yer family in to bears, that'll be a hoot."

They were greeted by Doric, who by the curiosity in his tone and the suspicious glance he gave Hiccup, they guessed he was asking were they had gone.

"We met an old lady woodcarver in the woods." Hiccup showed him the bear. "She's very good."

Merida glared at him and ran away.

Hiccup shrugged at Doric's inquisitive look. "Maybe she doesn't like blacksmithing bears?"

Even after a few hours of target practice, Merida had not calmed down in any significant amount. The worst part was she could not figure out exactly why; it was difficult to calm down when you don't know with any degree of accurately what you were mad about. A million little things bothered her and they were all starting to add up. She didn't want to be so mean with the boys but it was all so overwhelming and in the end her temper always won, she was intensely curious about the dragons, but whenever she got close to the black one when its owner wasn't around, it glared at her. Strange, considering it tolerated her brothers and let them climb all over it. Merida sighed; she had to find a way so that all those little things didn't get to her. She heard a noise and turned to find that one of those little things was walking towards her right now, trying to hide something behind his back and with no lizard in sight. She put down her bow and watched the skinny Viking.

"Listen, uh, princess. I just wanted to apologize for running off like that earlier andâ€¦ well; I know things have been less than cordial between us and I guess It's kind of justified, even if I have no idea why that isâ€¦"

"Get to the point, Master Haddock," Merida interrupted in a tone Hiccup recognized as one the Queen used when she was annoyed.

"My point is that I'm here to make a peace offering." Hiccup showed her what he was hiding behind his back. A plate with a small rounded cake in it, a few blue berries on the side of the cake served as decoration, a fork on the other side completed the picture. "So, what do you say, friends?"

Merida eyed the pastry like it was a live snake. She backed away slowly, eyes round as saucers. "A, yes sure, listen, A agree with whatever it was ye said. Now if ye excuse me A have to be somewhere else right now, it's an emergency, dreadfully important. Good talk an all that." She bolted.

Hiccup watched the princess leave wondering what that was about. _I wonder what that was about_. He remembered Matty's words. _That girl seems upset with you laddie, younguns like sweet things, maybe you should buy her a cake. _The fact she started cackling immediately after saying that, should have tipped him off. Absently taking a bite out of the cake he grimaced. "Ugh, too much butter."

* * *

><p>(1) Wild boar or not, it wasn't stupid enough to attack Stoick.<p>

(2):

The MacDonald clan: Easily recognizable by their paler than usual skin and bright red hair, the MacDonald's are mainly farmers and cooks, swearing allegiance to the MacGuffin clan; the MacDonalds have a blood feud with a King from a faraway land.

Clan Macleod (the immortal clan): A clan of nomads that travel the whole of Scotland, clan Macleod answers to no one, but despite of this, they have a surprisingly small amount of enemies; the reason for this is that they are incredibly hard to kill. Their nomadic

lifestyle hardened the Macleods to the point where they can easily survive wounds that would kill any other, earning them the title of the immortals. It is jokingly said that the only way to make sure a Macleod is dead is by cutting off his head.

The clan is currently being led by two brothers: Connor and Duncan; in defiance with an ancient clan law, that states that there shall be only one.

Clan MacGyver: a small clan in service off the Macintosh's, mainly comprised of smiths and woodworkers; the MacGuiver's are renowned for their easygoing demeanor and their creativity. If you have a problem to solve, this is the clan to go too.

Clan McClane: An offshoot of clan Macleod that settled on Dingwall's territory. Foul-mouthed, wisecracking, no-nonsense and just as hard to kill as the Macleods; the members of clan McClane are well-known for their rotten luck and their ability to be in exactly the wrong place at exactly the wrong time.

Clan Macbeth (the cursed clan): Skilled warriors with a silver tongue and a knack for politics, the Macbeth's would dominate the political landscape on Scotland if not for a single detail. A dreaded curse on their destiny. Cursed for their arrogance by a trio of witches, the more power and influence a Macbeth gains the closer he is to his doom and the doom of those around him. One day, a Macbeth will rule over all of Scotland, it will be the end of him and his clan.

* * *

><p>Just as I promised this chapter was extra long just for you guys. You know last update I put my chapter up first thing Friday morning and by midday I was at the middle of the page, by Saturday morning I was on the second page! What!? Then last Friday I didn't update, and the fics from that day are still there! It's a conspiracy I tell you, a conspiracy!<p>

Challenge time: Find the song and get a price, find the song and get a price. Ok, so I see no one has stepped up to the challenge of chapter seven. Well, I would like to inform you guys that the song from this chapter's challenge is from the same band.

* * *

><p>Show your support with some feedback.

11. Chapter 11

**After a lengthy and rather forceful hiatus I'm pleased to say that I'm back. I won't bother you with tales of alien abduction and sexy shenanigans; suffice it to say we still have an Ozone layer, the magic guns are back with their respective owners and all the dinosaurs made it back safely to their volcanically warmed valley beneath the city of Quebec, so it wasn't all bad. Unfortunatly when I finally got back home I found out my beta HungryDemon's stockpile on of souls was running low, and let me tell you; this guy goes through those things like they're skittles, it's ridiculous. Listen, dude I get you're under the command of gluttony and you have to adhere to a theme and aesthetic; you still have to take care of your health. I

don't care that lawyers are a dime a dozen down there, they're oily as all heck and you have to watch your cholesterol! Well anyway, the point is that he is going to be very busy for the foreseeable future and won't have time to beta for my story. So good luck old friend, and may your pantries fill to the brim. **

Now betaless, I had to search for someone to take HungryDemon's place. After consulting my horoscope for clues of how to proceed, I went all the way to the Egyptian pantheon to ask around, and the fourth bast I met agreed to be my new beta, for convenience sake I will call her bast4 from now on. If you're wondering how there can be more than one bast around, the answer is a definite "shrug- the first bast I met was german dude, don't know how that works either. The Important news is that I have a brand new beta and that thanks to her important contribution I could get the story out in a readable format. Yay!

When I came back from hiatus I did a little research and it turns out I _still_ don't own How to Train Your Dragon nor Brave 2012. Bummer.

* * *

><p>Chapter 11<p>

Late that night, when everyone that was not a guard on perimeter patrol was sound asleep in their tents, Hiccup sat alone in the middle of the camp, his figure highlighted in the dark by a great bonfire. His attention was centered on the ground where the pieces of his prosthetic leg lay disassembled; he scribbled some runes in his notebook and sighed. There was more thought in his leg than he had originally imagined. The spring in the inside kept the majority of the shock from hurting his leg as he walked and, as he found out once he took it apart, the way it was put together absorbed the rest. He had tried to use a normal peg leg once, as part of a bet with Snotlout, he hadn't lasted half a day. At first it wasn't too bad, but after a while, the pain became too much and he had to take it off. Each step he took sent a jolt of pain to his stump as he walked, so he had to spend the rest of the day on crutches.

"This is going to be hard to make," he murmured and allowed his mind to go back to dinner. The twins had gorged themselves on as much food as they could, despite his insistence that they would not run out. Not that he could blame them, as he himself had needed a few days to come to terms with the quantity of food available in the castle. Aside from that, the only other items of interest were the facts that the triplets kept staring at him with rare intensity as if trying to read his mind, and how withdrawn the princess had looked throughout the entire meal. Not wanting to dwell too much on situations he could not change, Hiccup went back sketching the parts laid out on the floor. Concentrated on his task as he was, determined on getting as much details as possible, Hiccup did not hear the sounds of someone approaching.

"Why would ye want to be me friend?" A soft voice startled him.

"Uh?" Was Hiccup's witty response.

Merida sat on a log not too far from him and stared at the fire. "Why

would ye want to be me friend?" she repeated.

Hiccup stared at her for a little while, not understanding the question before he decided to just take the plunge. "Why wouldn't I want to be yer, I mean your friend?"

"What?" It was Merida's turn for a brilliant comeback as the question threw her for a loop.

"Let's be honest for a second." The young Viking shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "There is no possible way that you are going to choose me as your husband. That is just how things are; I learned some time ago that some things you can't change." His face grew sad as memories of futilely trying to measure up to what he believed his father thought would make a good Viking and failing every time.

"Back home, I promised that I would do everything in my power to gain your love and be your husband." From his position, Hiccup was unable to see the massive blush on Merida's face at the sincerity of that statement. "But if we really think about it, how would I do that? What am I gonna do? Kidnap you? Even if we put aside the fact that you probably weight more that I doâ€¦"

"Are ye calling me fat?"

"What would I do on the remote chance I'm able to drag you off to Berk?"

"Very remote."

"Yes, I know." He waved her off. "But then what? I just dragged you all the way to Berk and for what? Vikings and Scotts are at war now. I came here for a peace treaty and now we're at war, congratulations. It's like going to your new neighbor's house for a friendly chat and five minutes later you're chopping off his limbs and setting his house on fire; it defeats the purposeâ€¦" Catching himself rambling, Hiccup forcibly stopped himself. "My point is, one day you'll be Queen and, barring my horrible, horrible death from one of the many dangerously stupid activities I usually do, I will be chief of Berk one day too. It would be nice if one day if either of us is in trouble we could just call on the other for help."

"That sounds nice," she answered softly. "A wish A could believe ye." Her face looked sad, as if ashamed to admit it.

"Wellâ€¦" Hiccup's Expression changed several times as he tried to figure out what to say. "I'm sorry to hear that, but it's true. Getting your way through deceit is not really the Viking way of doing things." He shrugged. "We're more of a 'split your skull with an axe' kind of people."

Merida snorted. "Ye? Lift an axe?"

"It could happen," he defended. "Maybe not one of those gigantic axes some Vikings like to use. But, there are other sizes; I should know. I make them."

"Do ye really?"

"Yes I can make knives, swords, spears; you name it, I can make it."

"Can ye make bows?"

Hiccup deflated at the question. "Bow and arrow are not all that effective against dragons. So I never learned how to make one." Seeing the princess losing interest, he quickly elaborated. "I've made a few crossbows and I once used the leftover remains of destroyed siege equipment to build a bola launcher that uses the same principles."

"Did it work?"

Hiccup frowned. "Yes, a little too well if you ask me." Willing the bad memories away, he continued. "So, I guess I could make a bow. But, it would most likely not be a very good one, because I'm not too used to working with wood that way. Maybe if I made it out of metalâ€¦" he mused.

Merida snorted softly. "A don' think metal would work."

"It would depend on the metal I suppose." He shrugged. "A metal like gold would be too soft, and Iron would be far too heavy. Aluminum, maybe?"

"Awhatminum?"

"Aluminum," he repeated. "On one of his visits to the island, trader Johan brought a strange metal from a far away country. He told us that it was the way of the future and sang praises about its many properties. Since we were trying to get back on his good graces after some bum deal with a bard, we bought all of it. And let me tell you, for that price you would think he was selling us Mithril."

"Wot's Mithril?"

"Mithril is an incredibly rare metal. It's light as a feather and stronger than tempered steel, it also shines like the most beautiful silver. It can only be mined by dwarves in the realm of dark fields, Nidavellir because only they know the secrets to properly working with it."

Merida's face lit up at the last part. She loved hearing tales of grand adventure and fantastic creatures; they always filled her with wonder and the desire to be free enough to experience all those things. To see those far away places, to fight those terrible enemies, to find those mythical creatures. She had already seen wisps and ghosts and dragons; fairies and mermaids couldn't be far behind.

As the night progressed, Merida tried to keep the topic of the conversation on the mythical. She told him about Kelpies and Selkies and Wisps. He in turn told her of the nine realms and the creatures that inhabit them. They talked for hours, until Merida yawned and realized she could barely keep her eyes open. "A should go to bed now." She stood up. "It wasâ€¦ nice, talking to ye. Good night Hiccup."

"Good nightâ€¦ Meridaâ€¦" He stood as well, or tried too, because his

foot was still on pieces on the floor. "Great, I forgot about you." He sighed. "Well, now. What goes where?"

XxX

When morning came, the twins were stuffing their faces with the various meats on the breakfast table, much to Hiccup's embarrassment. "I'm being serious guys, we are not gonna run out of food."

"Who cares," Ruffnut said between bites, "This stuff is delicious."

Tuffnut nodded. "How come our food isn't this good?" He looked at Hiccup.

"Because we don't have the spices for that." Seeing the blank looks on their faces, he explained. "Those little crushed plants that the cooks put on the food make it taste better. Those plants are way too expensive for us and Berk's too cold to grow them ourselves." Seeing Tuffnut start to speak, Hiccup cut him off. "No, it can't just be any plant. Remember when Astrid ate that dragon nip?" The twins chuckled at that and continued eating.

After the meal was over, everyone split off to do their own things and Hiccup was left alone with Ian. "So, what is there to do in a Scottish camping trip like this one?" he asked the other teen.

"What would you normally do in a Viking camping trip?" Ian asked back.

"Me? I usually hunt for trolls."

"Have you ever captured one?" Ian looked interested.

"Not even a glance of one." Hiccup didn't look too happy about that.

"Maybe it's because your name is designed to scare them off," mused the vain Scott, remembering an earlier conversation he had with the Viking.

Hiccup opened his mouth to fire a retort and closed it after a few seconds, his expression becoming pensive. "I've never thought of it like that."

Ian laughed. "Regardless, with powerful virile bachelors as ourselves on a trip, we would hunt, we would brawl, maybe even share some beauty tips." He pointed at himself. "This face doesn't just happen. Or we could simply ditch it all and go find a pub, to drink and brawl and dance with the local girls."

Hiccup gave him an odd look. "Beauty tips?"

"Don't knock it, big boy. Men like us must always look their best, to rouse, to inspire." He shook his head from side to side, causing his hair to follow in a wave of curls.

Watching it happen, Hiccup could have sworn the hair was moving in slow motion. As he mulled over how it could possibly do that, he heard a couple servant girls squeal and faint in the distance. "I

don't think my hair can ever look as fabulous as yours," he deadpanned.

Ian scoffed. "Of course it can't. A little shine would do wonders for you though. How else are you supposed to pick up girls?"

"Why would I even want to go around picking up girls? We're competing for one right now!"

"Never underestimate the ego boosting power of a little song and dance with a beautiful maiden," Ian told him, then he frowned. "Anything more would be dangerous for men in our positionsâ€¦ well, my position anyway. But you just nailed the dilemma. Anything we could do as guys in this camping trip would most likely put us in the princess's bad graces." _Probably not that Viking girl's though_, he thought, as he remembered a scene from yesterday.

Flashback

Once the servants finished setting up the camp, Ian found himself inexplicably alone. Hiccup and the princess had disappeared into the woods, _interesting_. Doric was practicing his caber toss, _boring_. William was staring in the direction of their two guests, _dull_. The Viking male seemed to be talking with the royal triplets, and judging by his expressions and body movements he was probably narrating some bloody Viking fairy tale to the trio of princes, who were paying rapt attention, _cute_. The Viking girl was off practicing spear thrusts some distance away, _how symbolic_.

Now with a destination in mind, Ian adjusted his expression to one he knew girls found irresistible and approached the braided twin. As he drew near, he found out she was cheerily singing to herself but couldn't quite make out the lyrics, when he didâ€¦

"Knife-a goes in,

Guts-a come out,

That's what raiding enemies is all about!" (1)

He showed that he was smarter than some people gave him credit for, by turning around and walking away.

End flashback.

"How about a spar?" Ian looked excited at the prospect.

Hiccup shook his head. "Nope, not happening. I make weapons, not use them. You're gonna have to find someone else for that."

"Don't be boring. I'm getting all kinds of rusty." Ian whined.

"I'm not doing it and you can't make me." Hiccup crossed his arms.

Twenty minutes later.

"See it's not that hard," the Mackintosh heir lectured as he took a swing with his sword. "Do you really know nothing about sword fighting?" he asked as he took another swing then gave his sword a

twirl.

"Not even a little," Hiccup confirmed from the shade of a tree where he saw Ian practice. "Which is why I don't do spars."

"So let me get this straight. You live in a village full of dragon busting battle ready Vikings, and not one of them taught you how to use a sword properly?"

Hiccup shrugged. "They were probably afraid I would chop off one of my own limbs by accident."

Ian stole a quick glance at Hiccup's metal leg. "I can see why they would think so."

"Hey!" The rest of Hiccup's reply was cut off when princess Merida bounded over to them, a brilliant smile on her face.

"Do ye gentlemen fancy a ride?"

Ian smiled charmingly. "An excellent idea your Highness. We should depart post haste."

Merida rolled her eyes. "Let's jus go find everyone."

After a bit of searching, they found the others in a rather bizarre scene. Doric MacGuffin was hogtied on the ground with a perplexed look on his face. He was flanked by one twin at each side and had the triplets standing on top of him, proudly posing for William, who was calmly painting the proud hunters and their bewildered prey.

"Oh my various gods, they teamed up." Hiccup voice was filled with dread.

* * *

><p>1- Were you expecting a Disney musical number?<p>

* * *

><p>In the cold vastness of space no one can hear you scream. But if you leave a comment in the box below this text I sure as hell will read it!

12. Chapter 12

A giant thanks to my beta bast4 for making what I write passable. I guess you could say she makes meâ€¦ (Puts on sunglasses) Write like an Egyptian (Starts dancing uncontrollably).

**During my travels in the underworld some big cheese offered to trade my soul for ownership of How to Train Your Dragon and/or Brave 2012. However, since my soul legally belongs to the ACME Corporation (I just rent the thing, long story) I still don't own squat. **

* * *

><p>Chapter 12<p>

After setting Doric free and an ineffectual scolding to both sets of siblings, they all went for a ride in the countryside, Hiccup and the twins flew in lazy circles above them, occasionally swooping down. They had no trouble keeping up which seemed to annoy Merida's horse for some reason.

Of the Highlander teens only Merida and Doric rode on Shire horses, the MacGuffin heir looking more proportionate in his than the princess. William's horse was a chocolate colored stallion with a white diamond on his forehead and a sharp gaze, it looked more intelligent than its rider as it seemed to steer himself with no input at all from the young Dingwall. Bringing up the rear was Ian, mounting a beautiful white mare that had a lot of trouble navigating the obstacles in the forest but pulled ahead when the terrain was clear.

Merida was having a blast, she was clearly the best rider and she proved it by riding circles around the other teens, literally from time to time and dispensing little taunts here and there. Every so often, she would disappear into the woods and come out a while later to urge them on. On one of those returns, they all noticed that she didn't look as cheerful as she had been before.

"Ye have to come look at this!" She speeded off.

They followed her to a small clearing that had obviously not been a clearing for too long.

"Wot do ye make of this?" She asked no one in particular.

Hiccup took the site in. "It looks like someone's been a bad boy."

And it did; all around them, the trees sported various amounts of damage. Some had burns, some of them were uprooted while others were snapped in half, practically all of them had claw marks. The ground was no better, the soil was upturned and there were deep gashes and burn marks everywhere.

"What manner of creature or conflict could create such devastation?" Ian wondered out loud.

Hiccup and Doric turned to look at the twins. "Nuh uh." Ruffnut shook her head. "We never even got close to this place."

The teens followed the path of destruction on foot until they found what was most likely its point of origin, the shores of the Loch Ness. It was there that they saw something Hiccup sincerely did not want to see: a field of Blue Oleanders, well, part of one anyway, seeing as someone had already burned off half of it.

To the amazement of the Highlander teenagers, the moment their guest for the past month saw the half burned field, his mostly nonchalant demeanor and attitude changed in the span of a few seconds.

"Ruff, Tuff, you guys take Toothless and the princess and go back to the camp, keep an eye out for anything out of the ordinary. Princess, I need you to put the guards in alert, whatever did this may still be around." The twins immediately nodded in agreement, but Merida glared at him until Ruffnut whispered something in her ear and she was all

smiles again.

That done, Hiccup turned towards the young lords. "If someone wants to go back, now would be a good time to do so, because I'm going to need one of you to go with them and bring back a change of clothes for the rest of us."

Doric looked like he wanted to go back so he could make sure Merida was safe, but he said nothing and held his ground. William looked like he wasn't paying any attention whatsoever to the situation. Ian for his part took out his sword and struck a heroic pose. "To flee when there's a battle afoot? Inconceivable."

Hiccup could have sworn he heard a couple of squirrels squeal and faint on a nearby tree. "There is not going to be a battle. Whatever it was that did this." He gestured to the half burned plain. "Is long gone by now. I just want to take a look around and investigate."

"Then why send the princess back?" Merida went back to glaring at him at the question.

"Because I'm not lying," explained the Viking. "Just because it's not here doesn't mean it's not nearby, and someone should warn the camp."

XxX

After a brief discussion, it was decided that William would go back for the clothes and they set about exploring the wreckage.

"What do you think happened?" Ian was curious.

"You will probably think I'm crazy, but I'm fairly sure a dragon did this," Hiccup answered him.

"A dragon in Scotland? Why not a manticore or a troll?" Ian wasn't too sure.

Hiccup scratched his head. "I don't know about that; however, since we're in a field of Oleanders, my best guess would be that a Scauldron did this."

Doric spoke a few words and by the tone of them, Hiccup guessed he made a question. "The Scauldron is a type of dragon that lives underwater," he answered in a distracted manner while looking at the claw marks on a fallen tree. "Razor sharp teeth, spits boiling hot water, extremely venomous, can't miss it."

"What makes you believe it's this dragon in particular?" It was Ian's turn to ask.

"The Oleander field, Scauldrons like to eat the Blue Oleander flower which is poisonous to some dragons. That's why I sent the dragons back to camp. The flower is also most likely the reason the Scauldron is venomous himself."

"I never understood the difference between venomous and poisonous," Ian commented.

"If it bites you and you turn green it's venomous, if you bite it and turn green it's poisonous." Hiccup shook his head. "This doesn't make any sense though, why would it destroy its own food supply?"

"Maybe it didn't," Ian told him.

"You think another dragon did this?" Hiccup was curious.

"Not necessarily. What would you do if there was a giant lizard hanging around in your back yard? You'd try to make him not be there anymore, right?"

Hiccup nodded.

"Suppose you find him munching on some plants. You'd go 'that dragon there only eats those plants. If I get rid of them maybe it'll go away.' How would you do that?"

"By setting them on fire!" Hiccup finished. "And if the dragon saw that, it would probably have caused all those damages chasing the one responsible."

"Or," added Ian. "He could also have sprinkled some poison all over them in hopes of killing it. You kill a dragon and you get a nice mantel piece for the chimney at home and a lot of bragging rights for your next visit to the pub, not to mention like a month's worth of meat."

"Very little of the dragon's edible, and the part that isâ€¦ I don't want to eat it," Hiccup dismissed the last point. "But if the dragon tasted the poison, it could have thrown a temper tantrum and caused all that destruction in the midst of a rage."

"Neither of those situations spells out a happy ending for our imaginary patriot."

"Patriot?" Hiccup gave him a funny look.

"Sure, a man sees creature of nightmares on the sacred soil of our land and tries to drive it off. There is no better definition of a patriot." Ian paused for a second at the face the young Viking made. "Don't give me that look. Aside from a two headed chicken I saw on a fair and a magically enhanced demonic bear, your dragon was the first true creature of myth I ever saw, and I immediately went into kill or be killed mode."

Hiccup gave him a half shrug, not really wanting to concede the point but not seeing any other choice. "We're getting off topic here; besides, this dragon has sharp peg like teeth, perfect for spearing fish. If the Scauldron had caught him, it would have been a bloodbath."

Ian nodded. "The moss growth on these scratches shows this happened at most two days ago, not enough time for all traces of something like that to disappear."

"There you go. Our imaginary suspect got out of it safe and sound."

Ian's response went unheard as Doric called them to his side to

inspect some black goo he found, it smelled horrible and the plants around it were dead.

"Uhg, what's that smell? Is thatâ€|?"

"Dragon barf?" Answered Hiccup. "Most likely, yes."

"Gross, I'm going to need a shower after this is over."

"Yeah, about that. Didn't you wonder why we sent William for clothes?"

"I thought you just wanted him out of the way. You mean you want us to bathe in the Ness? When the dragon that did all that damage is probably lurking around underwater?"

Hiccup had expected that reaction. "If you don't provoke it, it'll leave you alone." Ian didn't look convinced. "Listen, the Blue Oleander is dangerous to some dragons and we have been in the middle of a field of it for a while now. Toothless is one of the dragons the flower affects and wellâ€|" Hiccup's tone changed to his best imitation of Gobber. "In ma experience, there are only two things that help in this situation. One, is a nice cold dip and a scrub, the other one, is the cleansing power of _fire_."

30 minutes later.

"See? It's not so bad. The water isn't even that cold." Hiccup consoled a grumpy Ian Macintosh, he even submerged himself completely to prove the point. While underwater, he heard a soft crooning far away, too soft for it to be from a Scauldron so he dismissed it.

"What would you know?" Ian shot back when Hiccup emerged. "You're a Viking. I could leave you frozen on an iceberg and you probably wouldn't think it too cold."

Hiccup laughed at that. _If I ever become a frozen Viking, I'd punch Gobber in the face just for the heck of it._ "Don't be such a drama Queen, Doric seems to be having a good time."

The brawny Celt's verbal reply was not understood. "See? He agrees with me."

Ian scolded. "You don't know that! For all we know, he's asking for some Haggis." He turned to Doric who was glaring at him. "I'm sorry but I can't understand a word you say."

"What's got your skirt all up in a bunch? I thought you said skinny dipping was an activity to enjoy on these outings?" Hiccup egged him.

"With girls!" Ian exclaimed exasperated. "You can't tell me Vikings don't-" The rest of Ian's statement was cut off by William Dingwall cannon-balling into their midst.

XxX

It would take at least another two hours for them to go back to camp, where they encountered the sight of Tuffnut, unconscious on the

floor, wrapped in enough rope to make him look like a caterpillar. Ruffnut sat on top of him while she played a dice game with the triplets and the princess.

Hiccup had been afraid that the princess would be mad at him for making her go back to the camp, but he was willing to weather the storm. He was sure she would have been even madder if he had made her take a bath and burn her clothes like he had done with the young lords. And he would have done it, had become necessary. Fortunately, she was all smiles once more, though there was a rosy tint to her cheeks for the rest of the day whenever she talked to him or the young lords.

They all decided that they would move the camp in the morning and stayed close by for the rest of the day. They played some traditional Scottish games, had some light spars, and even tossed some cabers, well, only Doric tossed them, the rest of them gave up after some time of futile tries and started throwing firewood logs around instead. It was a fun day, Hiccup decided, though something about the princess's cheery attitude bugged him for some reason. He would find out why, later that night.

* * *

><p>Holy smokes! 50 reviews, that's like twice 25 reviews! I want to thank you all for reading and leaving a little something behind. Believe me when I say your comments are the only reason this story hasn't receded back in to the depths of my physique, never to be heard from again. Like my Muppets "X men crossover: Muppets of the atom.

13. Chapter 13

All thanks to the cat goddess of betas bast4. The only deity that works for catnip.

I do not own How to Train Your Dragon nor Brave 2012. I once thought I did, but it turned out to be gas.

* * *

><p>Chapter 13<p>

Night fell and Merida found herself laying on her cot unable to sleep. She played the day's events in her head, both good and bad, and couldn't decide how to feel about them. She had mixed feelings at best, something she had never had to deal with before. Knowing that sleep simply would not come to her, she decided to get some fresh air. As soon as she left her tent, a voice stopped her in her tracks. It was just a guard. That night's tension was relatively high, perimeter patrol was doubled and even the muscular hunk that guarded William's tent looked more alert than usual, which was saying something because he always looked like he was about snap someone in half. Hiccup had told her that that look of barely contained violence made him feel a little homesick.

While she wondered where that thought of the Viking had come from, Merida noticed that, just like the night before, he was sitting by himself close to the bonfire with his dragon nowhere in sight. She

crept closer and saw that he didn't notice her arrival. She watched him work for a few minutes in silence. He would take a piece of his disassembled metal foot and weigh it in his hands before making an annotation on his notebook and moving on to another piece. "Wot are ye doing?"

The young Viking was startled by the sudden question. "Oh, umm, haâ€¦ Hello, umm, today I realized that I've never felt weighted down by my metal foot. So that means that it must weigh close enough to my original flesh and bone one that I was never able to tell the difference, weight wise at least_." It also brings forth the picture of Gobber with my severed foot on one hand and my metal one on the other, trying to judge if the weight is close enough or if he should make adjustments. _He suppressed a shiver. "It's also pretty well balanced. If I want to keep the weight distribution the same no matter what material I make it out off, I'll have to make all sorts of extra steps and calculations, including measuring the weight of all the pieces."

"Are ye gonna make yer feet out of gold now? A can see it now, they'll call ye Goldfoot Hiccup. A heck of a pirate name don't ye think?" She teased him.

Hiccup smiled. "Aye! Famous be the tale of captain Goldfoot Hiccup an his first mate Firehead Merida."

"How come Ah'm the first mate? Ah'm a princess, A should be the captain."

"Because I'm the one with the gold feet, foot," he corrected himself. "Obviously the one with all the bling-bling should be the one in charge," he told her, matter of factly.

They both shared a laugh. "Wot are ye really gonna make it out off?"

"Iron."

"Isn't it made of Iron already?"

"Yes and no." Seeing the look that the princess gave him, he quickly elaborated. "You told me that cold iron is like poison to fairies and that they don't go near it, right?"

Merida nodded. "Aye, one of the best ways to keep their mischief out of yer house is to hang a horseshoe by the doorway, an putting open scissors beneath a baby's crib keeps em from being replaced by changelings."

"Right, I want my foot to double as a good fairy whacking instrument, and the thing about iron is that you can add stuff to it to make it stronger or lighter or more brittle. But since doing that changes the amount of iron in the metal, it should also change how much it affects these creatures, right?"

Merida shrugged. It made sense, sort of.

"Generally speaking, all the iron we normally use has impurities because, as long as we can use it, who cares? My foot is made of the run the mill stuff and if I want it to be _really _effective, I will

have to purify the iron as much as I can, which will in turn change its weight and other properties."

Merida mock yawned. "Remind me to talk to ye the next time A have trouble sleeping. It's like sitting in me Mum's lessons."

Hiccup shrugged. "You asked."

"A know. A'll jus' let ye work in peace."

They stayed in comfortable silence for some time, until Hiccup started noticing something was off. "It feels like something's bothering you. Do you want to talk about it?" Merida didn't answer, and Hiccup continued working in silence for a while longer.

"Yer probably gonna think it's dumb."

"Probably," Hiccup confirmed.

"Hey!"

"If you think something is dumb, it probably is. But if it matters to _you,_ it will matter to your friends."

"A don't have a lot of friends, ye know?" He heard her say softly. "A don't know if Ah'm doing this right."

"Is this about the super cheery Merida of today and her day long epic battle against her bold and fiery counterpart?"

"So ye noticed, huh?"

"Not really."

"Then why did yeâ€|?"

"I didn't notice it during the day," he clarified. "But looking back on it, a lot of the time it seemed like you were forcing yourself to have a good time." He frowned. "I don't know if friendship is something that can be forced or rehearsed," Hiccup pondered, both for him and to her. "It certainly didn't work for me. But you already have a lot of people that want to be around you. Just be yourself, and if even half of what the Queen says about you is true, then you won't have any problems finding friends."

"Ye talk to me Mum?"

"She's been teaching me about a few subjects, to read, write and speak Latin mostly; I didn't actually ask to learn to speak it or all the extras, but I couldn't just say no to the Queen."

Merida made a face at that. "Sorry aboot that, Mum doesn't know how to stop sometimes."

"Don't worry about it. The attention isâ€| nice." Hiccup looked sheepish.

"Wot does me Mum say aboot me?"

"She says you're headstrong and brave. That you take pride in who you

are and what you can do. That you can be reckless but that it is born of your passionate nature. That you should really learn not to put your weapons on the table and that a little more patience and grace wouldn't hurt. And that above all, that you have a kind and heroic heart that will always guide you to do the right thing."

Merida's throat tightened. "She said that?"

"I have no reason to lie. She could have been talking about that maid of yours though; taking care of your brothers is not a job for the faint of heart."

She threw a rock at him.

XxX

"Can A ask ye a question?"

"Sure."

"Why did ye turn yer back at us?"

That gave Hiccup pause. "I'm sorry. What?"

"When we first met an yer friends were about to duke it out with us, ye got between us an then turned yer back to us. That was incredibly dumb. Why did ye do it?"

Hiccup thought about it for a bit, trying to remember all that he could from their first meeting. "I concluded that if the King's daughter was the kind of person that would shoot someone in the back, then war was inevitable no matter what I did."

Merida winced at that and Hiccup chuckled. She glared at him for it.

"Sounds cool, uh?" he asked. "But to tell the truth, I just acted without thinking. I knew Toothless wouldn't let anything happen to me though." He gave her a toothy half smile. "I do have the world's most impressive bodyguard."

"More impressive than that?" Merida nodded towards William's tent, or more exactly to the entrance of said tent, where a tall, impossibly muscled Highlander stood guard diligently, a serious look on his face.

"Okay, I have the second most impressive bodyguard," he conceded. "But who can compete with that? I didn't even know the human body had that many muscles, I mean look at him. The man has muscles on his muscles."

Merida chuckled. "I wouldn't say that too loud, he probably has muscles to move his ears around an listen better."

"I would not be surprised," said Hiccup in a lower tone of voice. "The last time I saw someone that looked like that, it was in a painting. Astrid and Ruffnut couldn't stop staring at it."

"A can see why. If he'd been in the running, ye'd be in yer house right now." She fanned herself, remembering the day she first met the

Lords' sons. She had been so angry that day, but she still remembered her first impression of her _suitors_:

She remembered seeing Macintosh and thinking that there would be no way that she would ever marry someone prettier than her and that MacGuffin was cute, but that hugging or even holding hands would be out of the question with how easily he crushed that poor log. Then Lord Dingwall started talking about his only son and his many heroic deeds while pointing to this tall and chiseled hunk of a man. Her first thought was disbelief that someone who looked like that could be related in any way shape or form to Lord Dingwall and, judging by her Mum's expression, she couldn't believe it either. That disbelief started to slowly change into another emotion she was still not ready to examine but that basically translated into 'yummy' when Lord Dingwall frowned and pulled a bucket of cold water named William from behind the mountainous man. She was immediately torn between disappointment, tenderness as Lord Dingwall tried to present this daft looking boy who seemed to have no idea of where he was as a ferocious and cunning warrior, and disgust that she might have to marry him.

"Do girls really like that sort of shape?"

"It doesn't hurt."

Hiccup had nothing to say to that, so he just continued working quietly.

XxX

"I've been wonderingâ€¦| What did you guys do while we were away?"

Hiccup's attention was on his notebook, so he didn't notice Merida's whole body tense or her face turning as red as her hair.

Flashback

Merida rode back to the camp with a determined expression on her face. She was a little angry at being dismissed and would have raised a big fuzz over it if the reasoning wasn't right on the money; the people at the camp needed to be warned and as the princess, her words would be heeded, she did have prior experience after all. The other reason she accepted so quickly to stay behind was that the girl Viking, Ruffnut, had promised her to let her fly in the two headed dragon and that she said that she was going to show her something 'cool'. To say that she was exited about flying would be an understatement. She found it odd that Hiccup hadn't tried his luck at wooing her with the help of his dragon by offering to take her flying. Sure, _she_ had been avoiding him, and his dragon glared at her whenever she drew near, but he never even tried. She was not going waste the opportunity.

As soon as they arrived, Ruffnut disappeared saying she had to go find something. Merida didn't care, she called forth all the servants and soldiers that were traveling with them and explained the situation as best she could. She organized the guards and implemented some safety measures everyone had to follow. Even if her father never gave her formal classes in any one subject, she always paid attention

to his war stories and learned all that she could from them.

She finished just in time to see William galloping away from the camp. She frowned and turned to Tuffnut who was just loitering around; she didn't get to say anything though, as his sister beat her to the punch. Literally.

"Hey Tuffnut!"

He turned around "What?" WHAM! And received a face full of shovel courtesy of his loving sister. "You're getting better at this," he idly commented before dropping like a rock.

Ruffnut ignored Merida's look of horror in lieu of addressing her brothers. "Did you bring the rope?"

The triplets nodded and showed her a sizable length of rope.

"Excellent! Today's lesson is: How to tie up a dumbass Viking and why too much rope is never enough."

After Ruffnut and the triplets finished mummifying Tuffnut, the Viking girl turned to her with a satisfied smile. "Am I awesome or what? Come on! Let's go spy on the boys."

Merida nodded incredulously for a moment before what she was agreeing caught up with her. "Wait, what? No! Ye said we would go flying in yer dragon!"

Ruffnut looked at her as one would a particularly slow child. "Well, duh! How do you think we're gonna get there?"

"We have A two headed dragon all to ourselves and all ye can think about is to go peeping on people we see every day? A think that's a dumb idea!"

"I'm not dumb, Melinda. I know what I'm doing."

"Merida!"

"Whatever." Ruffnut didn't care. "That flower's bad news and Hiccup's too curious not to check around. Do you know what that means?"

"Wot flower? Wot are ye talking about?"

"It means we're gonna get a shower scene!"

Merida's eyes widened and she was thankful she wasn't drinking anything at the moment or it would have been decorating the other girl's face. "Woot!?"

Ruffnut grinned mischievously. "There's nothing wrong with examining the merchandise before you go ahead and choose Hiccup anyway."

"Woot makes ye think Ah'm gonna choose Hiccup?!" She challenged, trying desperately to steer the conversation away from attempted voyeurism.

Ruffnut looked at her as if she had said something incredibly stupid. "Well, duh. Because you're not a moron."

Ruffnut seemed adamant, and in the end Merida's choices boiled down to either humoring the Viking girl's voyeuristic tendencies in order to fly on a dragon's back and possibly set something on fire or refuse to go with her and wait until Hiccup invited her to go flying with him, something that he never even hinted at since he got to the castle. She concluded that the choice was not a choice at all.

"Wot head do A get?"

End flashback

"A don't want to talk about that." She prayed he didn't hear the slight crack on her voice.

"What do you want to talk about then?" Hiccup didn't mind a change in topic.

"Dragons!" was the enthusiastic response. "Tell me why yer dragon has a fake tailfin."

It was Hiccup's turn to shift uncomfortably in his seat. "He had a bad fall."

"Was it the same bad fall that gave ye that?" She gestured to his missing foot.

Hiccup was surprised she remembered that bit of conversation from long ago and shook his head. "No. They are completely unrelated. The first time I ever saw Toothless, I was following a trail of broken trees. He was trapped in a cove after a terrible crash landing that ripped one of his tail fins off. I didn't know it at the time, but a downed dragon is a dead dragon, since they can't hunt properly or escape their predators."

Merida gasped at that.

"When I found out, I knew I had to help him somehow. So I brought him fish and I build him a new tailfin." Hiccup drew a quick sketch of the prosthetic and showed it to her.

"Nae foot thingy?"

Hiccup laughed. "At first, I thought it would be easy, that I could just attach the new limb and be done with it. Like a peg leg or a hook hand, but it was nothing that simple. On the very first fitting, I had to distract him with a bucket of fish while I climbed on his tail to hold it down, so I could attach the fin properly."

"Weren't ye worried he would turn around and bite yer head off?" Merida loved stories, and details like those fueled her interest.

Hiccup shrugged. "Back then it wouldn't have been that big of a loss." He waived off her apparent concern. "Besides, I'm a Viking. It's an occupational hazard."

Something about the answer struck Merida as just plain wrong. She

didn't had time to dwell on it since Hiccup continued with the story.

"and he did turn around. Fortunately, the first thing he saw was that his tail was whole again for some reason and immediately took flight (1). With me still on his tail!"

Merida chuckled at that.

"So there I was, clinging for dear life-" He mimed hugging Toothless's tail with his arms and legs. "-when I noticed that we were starting to fall. The fin I made had closed because of the wind. When I opened it up with my hands, we started to rise again and, I guess Toothless figured everything would be alright because that's when we parted ways. Literally, he took a sharp turn and went one way while I kept going in an entirely different direction. Good thing I landed in water."

Merida's chuckles became laughs.

"Thank you for the concern." Hiccup deadpanned.

"Ye poor baby. Did ye die?" She asked him with as much fake sounding concern as she could cram into her tone.

Hiccup closed his eyes and lowered his head in sorrow. "Sadly, yes. But I lived!" He finished with conviction.

She giggled.

"Well anyway, without me keeping the fin opened, Toothless couldn't keep flying and made a big splash not too far away. I realized that ifâ€" He then told her about building the saddle and how he had to chase Toothless around with it, about how the controls for the fin went from a simple rope that he pulled with his hand to the pedal he now used, about practicing and his cheat sheet. He told her about all his crashes and wipeouts during that period and how he did not get any better at flying until the moment he learned to let go of thought and he simply felt his way through.

Merida listened to the story intently. It was so different to the adventurous tales of heroics she was used to hearing. There was no heroic resolve, no looming crisis or imminent danger, just a series of blunders as he tried to help his friend. It also rang true to her in a way other stories did not, despite some holes he refused to explain, and that sometimes he started to say something only to stop and say something else. She guessed he was trying to hide the most embarrassing parts.

"Now it's your turn." Hiccup's voice snapped her out of her analysis. "I told you a story, now it's your turn to tell me one."

Merida agreed and told him the tale of Mor'duâ€" the first part anyway.

"â€"from nowhere, the biggest bear you've ever seen! His hide littered with the weapons of fallen warriors â€" his face scarred with one dead eye! He drew his sword and Whoosh! One swipe, his sword shattered, then chomp! Dad's leg was clean off! Down the monster's throat it went. For many years Mor'du was not seen again.

Roaming in the wild, he awaited for his chance for revenge." Merida finished the story with a roar and a laugh. "There's a second part. Play nice and Ah'll tell it to ye one day."

Hiccup listened to the tale, convinced that that was how a campfire tale should be. Judging by the words, the tones, the pantomime, he was sure a bard had gotten involved at some point to sharpen the edges. It was the story of how their king had lost his leg fighting a magical bear after all. Hiccup was still iffy about the last part but, since he rode a dragon, he was the least qualified to call bullshit on someone's story.

"Is that why they call your father the Bear King?" _stupid question_.

Merida nodded. "The sword an the knot are the Dunbroch clan banner, but the bear has been me dad's personal emblem since A was little. A remember he gave me a necklace decorated with them when A was a wee lass. A lost it by being selfish though." Her voice grew sad at the last part.

"You never know. Things have a way of coming around." Hiccup tried to cheer her up. "I'm sure you and your necklace will cross paths again." An image of a small toy dragon came to him.

"A hope not." Was the sincere response from Merida.

"What?" It confused Hiccup.

"Ah'm being dumb, pay me no attention."

"A difficult task; you kind of stand out."

Merida smiled at him and stood up. "Ah'm going to bed now. Good night Goldfoot, an thanks for the talk."

"Good night to you too Firehead."

With a laugh she was gone, leaving Hiccup to ponder on her parting words. He realized that Merida and Ian were the first persons he had ever talked to. Vikings in general were not a chatty bunch and his pear group wasâ€¦| difficult. Talking with the twins was the very definition of torture, Snotlout was a jerk, too much Fishlegs gave everyone a headache and Astridâ€¦| every time he spoke to Astrid they ended up planning something. They never just talked for the heck of it. Forcibly shaking off those thoughts, Hiccup decided to go to bed as well and stood to leave. Well, he tried to anyway, as his foot was still on pieces on the floor. "Dammit, not againâ€¦|"

* * *

><p>1- I know Toothless didn't turn around. Hiccup doesn't, and assumes he did.<p>

* * *

><p>Having stomach flu is not as much fun as it sounds, and it doesn't sound fun at all! If you'll excuse me I'll go back to vomiting now.

14. Chapter 14

****As always, a giant heap of thanks to bast4 for betaing my story. Though I wish she didn't sent the corrections in hieroglyphs.****

****I do not own How to Train Your Dragon nor Brave 2012. Even after I asked really politely through an e-mail they said no. Bummer.****

* * *

><p>Chapter 14<p>

Morning came and the camp was relocated to a new location at the foot of a mountain. As soon as they got there, Merida dragged them all off to climb it. That would set the tone for the next couple of days. Merida's activities became increasingly more physical, something the young lords happily encouraged, especially Doric. Hiccup found himself sitting off in the sidelines more and more. Part of it was because his prosthesis was becoming more uncomfortable and part of it was because he found little to no enjoyment in strenuous activities. Being benched did have some advantages. With more free time, he was able to think about and analyze the situation back on Berk more carefully. Deciding on a course of action, he wrote a letter to Astrid where he expressed his concerns and planned a course of action. He gave it to the twins and then he prayed to all the gods that he could remember by name that they would not lose it. He also advanced by leaps and bounds with the blue prints for his new foot.

During the nights, he sat and talked with Merida in front of the fire at the center of the camp. They talked mostly of little inconsequential topics, but deeper conversations snuck in here and there. From their talks, Hiccup got the impression that their experiences, despite looking so different at first glance, were eerily similar beneath the surface. Both of them were given responsibilities they were expected to live up to because of who they were. Despite giving it his all, he had failed spectacularly, and soon people decided to simply ignore him, all but forgetting about him. Merida, on the other hand, did not want any responsibility nor cared about what was expected of her and only wanted to be left alone. Yet she was always the center of attention, people believed in her and never stopped supporting her.

Hiccup was not sure how to feel about that. Jealousy and resentment battled for dominance until he remembered that the reason he wanted to kill a dragon in the first place was to get a girlfriend, to get people to pay attention to him. He didn't really care about helping out and he usually ended making the situation worse. Could he condemn her when he used to be just as selfish?

One thing was certain to him. The Merida he talked to at night was not the same person she had been before. Something had changed her and she never even hinted as to what. There was still a piece of the puzzle she refused to give him but he didn't mind. He still kept the majority of his life off limits to conversation, giving details and anecdotes but keeping the big picture out of it.

On the morning of the fifth day, they all woke to find that the twins and their dragon had disappeared without a trace. The triplets were

understandably upset and searched all over for them. Hiccup knew that with Barf and Belch gone, they could be anywhere and any chance of finding them was slim but didn't tell them. What bothered him was the stealthy way they departed; the twins couldn't be quiet to save their lives yet no one saw or heard them leave.

By midday, a messenger arrived at the camp and told them that they were return to the castle immediately. Preparing himself to leave, he found a letter tucked on Toothless's saddle; the envelope had an inscription on runic. _Read this alone_. He hid it in his vest and continued to prepare. They rode for most of the day, only stopping for lunch. The sun was starting to set when they arrived at castle Dunbroch. The King and Queen greeted the group at the door with the Lords nowhere to be found. Elinor, in a rare break from protocol, gave Merida and the triplets a big motherly hug.

Ian took the opportunity to address the King. "May I inquire as to the whereabouts of my father?"

Fergus frowned lightly. "All three Lords had to go back to their domains." He gave no further explanations and Ian bowed his head in understanding.

Fergus then turned to Hiccup. "Ye may want to tone down yer antics with yer dragon, lad. Ah've had reports of a black dragon wrecking havoc near some towns.

Hiccup, who was watching the Queen fuss over her children, was startled by this. "But I haven'tâ€|"

"Hiccup's been with us the entire time, Dad, an Toothless can't fly on his own." Merida intervened.

Elinor was surprised by her daughter speaking on behalf of the Viking but hid it well. Fergus just brushed the whole thing aside. "We'll talk about this later. Fer now, ye should all clean yerselves up an prepare fer dinner."

Dinner was a cheerful affair, dominated by Merida's voice as she animatedly told her parents all about the trip and Fergus's boisterous laughter. Once it was over, Hiccup found himself alone in his room. With Toothless already asleep, he decided to read the letter he had found earlier.

Hiccup. I'm sorry for the hasty departure but I have an image to maintain. I don't believe I need to remind you that you should destroy this letter after you finish reading it. Negotiations have hit a snag and I must return to Berk. I will use this opportunity to remind you of the importance of your task. A simple pact of alliance is too fickle to suffice to our needs. We need that princess on Berk and we need her there of her own volition.

Hiccup frowned, he hated that the whole alliance between Vikings and Highlanders basically boiled down to Berk needing a hostage. It wasn't fair to Merida that they couldn't find a better solution. He sighed and continued reading.

If some rumors I've heard are true, you've been sowing a little chaos on the side. I approve, just try to be more discrete.

On a more relevant note, the Scotts have been through some Viking attacks recently; some of them more inland than what a normal expedition would be comfortable with. It would be in our best interests for you to investigate; try to disguise it a gesture of good will if you can.

A word of caution, try to keep your dragon out of sight for this one. While our relations with other tribes is a good one, the revelation of our alliance with the Scotts to them before it's completed could get us in trouble; and the presence of a dragon just screams Berk. If the raiders are Berserkers, remember that, for the moment, there can be no witnesses that you or your dragon are in Scotland. Hiccup, don't get queasy on this, it is important.

Hiccup sighed and walked over to Toothless. The letter was unsigned but there was no doubt as to who wrote it. "I need a favor bud. Get rid of this for me will you?"

Toothless lazily opened one eye and saw Hiccup holding a piece of paper in front of him. He gently blew a small gout of blue flame and reduced it ash. Hiccup scratched him behind his earflaps in thanks. "That's one problem down." He sighed. "It almost makes you wish you could solve all your problems the same way, huh bud?"

Next morning, Hiccup asked round for a smithy, he was informed that the castle had one but that it was unused and had fallen into disrepair. Deciding that his best bet was the smithy in the nearby town, Hiccup headed there for the first time. Even though the town was just a ten minute walk from the castle, Hiccup was worried he would get ousted as a Viking and lynched or worse. Fortunately, he wasn't alone.

"So the town's name is Dunbroch huh? You guys are just overflowing with imagination, aren't you?"

"Says the man named after a hiccup."

"It's to scare away trolls."

"An does it work?"

"Do you _see_ any trolls around us?"

"TouchÃ©."

"Are you sure it's okay for you to come with me?"

Merida's shrug did not set Hiccup at ease in the slightest. "Ye worry too much. Do ye even know where the smithy's located? Or how to get Montgomery to help ye?"

"I figured some gold wouldâ€¦ wait, what? Montgomery? You know this guy?"

She nodded "Yes A do. He was the castle's smith for many years before he opened his own shop on town. He made me many a sword while A was growing up."

Once they got to the smithy, Hiccup was too distracted by the familiar sounds and smells to notice the owner until he spoke to

them. "Mother's love! Is that you, lass?"

"Monty!" Merida ran to give man a hug. "How's me favorite sworderer?"

'Sworderer?' Hiccup mouthed silently.

'Monty' was a heavyset moustachioed balding man with grey hair that laughed joyfully and returned the hug. "A can't complain lass. Now, woot brings a princess to me humble shop?"

"A came because me friend Hiccup needs yer services."

Montgomery frowned slightly and turned to the boy. "Yer that Viking everyone's been talking aboutâ€¦" It wasn't a question.

"People talk about me?"

"A expected ye to be taller."

"I get that a lot."

"Woot can A do fer ye?"

"I need some pure Iron beyond what many would consider practical, but judging by your forge, I don't think you can manage it without weeks of heating and reheating." Hiccup spared a glance at the forge.

"Laddieâ€¦ don't ya think ye shouldâ€¦ rephrase that?" The Scotsman's voice gained an edge.

Hiccup didn't notice. "Probably, this design offers a lot of control but the position of the air intakes will make it harder to reach higher temperatures."

Montgomery was a bit mollified that the boy at least knew what he was talking about. "That's nae a problem if ye donae need the heat to go that high, laddie. Why do ye need the Iron pure? Is regular Iron not good enough for ye?"

"It's a vanity project, Monty." Merida intervened, amused at Hiccup's look of indignation at her comment.

"Bleh, A thought A was through with that crap when A left the castle. If ye want something pretty, go find a jeweler."

"A brought ye some Scotch." Merida singsonged. "It's really good."

The older Scott's face contorted as if in pain for a moment. "Fine, but yer better off with silver if ye want to impress yer friends back home. Purifying iron that much is a tricky and arduous task."

"It's not for impressing anyone and I don't need that much of it, I just want my foot to repel fairies."

Hearing that explanation from the boy, Montgomery finally noticed that instead of one foot he had a metal contraption. "Why do ye want to spook the Fey, laddie?"

"Why wouldn't I?" Hiccup seemed perplexed by the question.

Monty fought the urge to palm his face. Vikings were a tad more superstitious than the Highlanders(1) and the boy lived in a place where the princess turned her mother into a bear, so he was probably just nervous. "Fine A'll make ye yer foot, but yer gonna have to leave it here for a few days."

"I don't think you understand. I'm a blacksmith apprentice; I want to make my own foot."

"Are ye kidding me?" He turned to Merida. "That better be some good Scotch, lass."

"It's the one dad hides from me mum." She smirked.

Montgomery grimaced and turned towards Hiccup. "Yer lucky A have a more enlighten view of Vikings than most Scotts, laddie. Now let's look at that leg."

They stayed in the smithy for a few hours planning and Monty proved his knowhow by making some adjustments to Hiccup's foot that took away the uncomfortable feeling that the prosthesis had started to give him recently. He still needed to replace it, but it wasn't an urgent matter anymore. one problem down, twenty more to go. As they made their way back to the castle, Hiccup couldn't stop thinking about Knifnut's letter. Being reminded so bluntly of the reason for his stay in Scotland made him remember a couple of doubts he had since his father presented him with this plan. Now he was in a position to get some answers. He was so engrossed in his thoughts that he failed to hear a familiar sounding Viking curse.

* * *

><p>1- No they weren't<p>

* * *

><p>Man, when they told me that dish was to die for; I didn't think they meant it literallyâ€|

By the way I've been meaning to ask you guys for some time. Remember chapter 10? Including the four main ones, which clan would you be in? A MacDonald? Or maybe a Macleod?

15. Chapter 15

Many a thanks to bast4 for her beta goodness.

I do not own How to Train Your Dragon nor Brave 2012. But I wrote a letter to Santa Claus asking for them, so I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

* * *

><p>Chapter 15<p>

It was a few hours after lunch that the Queen found Hiccup holed up

in the library, nose buried in a large tome. "Did you really miss the library that much during your absence, Master Haddock?" Her smile faded when she saw the book he was reading.

Hiccup's face was unreadable when he addressed the Queen. "Is this true, your Highness?"

Elinor did not have to strain herself to guess what the boy was referring to. "Do you find it too strange a premise?"

"I find it unorthodox if nothing else." Was Hiccup's answer.

Elinor took a seat. "What you must understand is that the creation of this kingdom was a miracle all by itself. Our clans and warriors are all brave and true; however, their biggest hubris wasâ€¦|_is_ their arrogance and overconfidence. Before the kingdom was united as it is now, all the clans, even the ones that depended on each other, were in a state of war." Elinor looked at Hiccup intently. "What do you know about the war we had with the Vikings, Master Haddock?"

Hiccup gave the question some consideration. "Not much really, Berk was barely involved. From what I've been able to gather, after a few years of bad crops, most tribes formed a pact in which they agreed that instead of raiding each other for resources, they would all unite and raid someone else instead. No, not just raid, but conquer and occupy. That or some oracle proclaimed that the alignment of the stars meant the gods favored the cause of conquest." He shrugged. "The details are a little fuzzy; Vikings don't talk much about fights they lose. _Mostly because Vikings fights are usually to the death_. He added in his head.

The Queen nodded and avoided his gaze, as if ashamed of her next words. "When the Vikings came and wrought death and destruction to our country, it was the best thing that could have happened to us as a nation. Do not misinterpret my words, Master Haddock," she added when she saw the astonishment on the young Viking's face. "It was a dark and terrible time, and if it would prevent even a sliver of it from returning, I would sacrifice myself in an instant. However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that it was that same death and destruction that finally forced our warring clans to unite against a common threat. A threat dangerous enough that they had to truly struggle and depend on each other for the first time to avoid being wiped out."

"That's wonderful, your Highness, but theâ€¦|"

"Patience is a virtue, Master Haddock." She admonished. "As I was saying, enemies as they were, the clans never even thought of helping each other, even as they were being slaughtered. Too arrogant to ask for help and too overconfident to see that they needed it; their line of reasoning boiled down to: If my enemies get destroyed, they were not strong enough, my clan is the strongest of all, and we can handle anything. The Macbeths and my maiden clan tried to broker emergency alliances to repel the invasion but they failed, it was bleak time." Elinor's voice softened. "In the end, it was Fergus and clan Dunbroch that ended up turning the tide. He did not expect favors or concessions in return nor did he care if he was stabbed in the back for his efforts. He just wanted to protect Scotland, and in his wake, the others followed. That is why he is king, not because of royal blood, but because he could see past his prejudice and act to the

benefit of all. Even those he considered his enemies."

"I sense a 'but' in there," Hiccup commented.

The queen gave him an annoyed look. "No one likes a know it all, Master Haddock. Nonetheless, you are correct. As I just told you, Fergus rules not by royal blood nor by right of conquest; in that sense, all the clans have equal political standing and the same opportunity to rule."

"So you added this to prevent a civil war?" Hiccup looked surprised by the concept; it was extreme to say the least.

"I would like to tell you that we put that there in the spirit of justice and equality. Nonetheless, I would be lying to you if I said we did not know exactly what we were doing. It was because of this that the kingdom got the stability it needed in its beginning."

Hiccup nodded in understanding. "Do you intend to go through with it?"

Elinor seemed offended by the question. "It would not be there otherwise, Master Haddock," she replied frostily. "It is for that reason that your stay in our home is dangerous."

Hiccup was stunned into silence by the comment. He was used to being dangerous in the 'look out, it's gonna blow!' sense, this was the first time he was dangerous in the political sense.

"Do not look so surprised, Master Haddock. You have to be dangerous in some way to play in the big leagues. Do not get a swelled head either. This kingdom has defied what we have come to accept as tradition before; should the need arrive, we would do so again."

Hiccup was absolutely sure that there was some context to the Queen's words that he was missing, but her words served to reassure him.

"But enough about that." Elinor gestured to a table on the far end of the library. "Since you are already here, we might as well start with the lesson plan I had prepared for later today. Come along, Master Haddock."

"Yes, your Highness." Hiccup had no option but to comply, unaware of the shadowy figure listening to their conversation.

XxX

Later that day.

"Ian, can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Hiccup! Excellent timing, I'm in the middle of creating and I need a sounding board."

Hiccup looked at him strangely. "Creating? It looks like you're doing sword tricks and posing in front of a mirror."

Ian waved off the commentary. "That's just part of the creative process, my friend. Now check this out: A Roman scouting party stumbles upon an ancient ruin. Exploring the rubble, they find a rock canister engraved with runes. Thinking treasure is inside, they open the canister, but instead of valuables, they find that they have released Morrigan, the phantom Queen, and old goddess of war. Who upon finding herself free shouts. 'AAAAhhh! After 10,000 years, I'm free! Time to conquer all!' Meanwhile in the fairy realm, Oberon, who's a giant floating head because of a fight with his wife, senses the disturbance and turns to Puck, who's made of metal because— well, Puck is weird. 'Puck,' he says. 'Morrigan's escaped. Recruit a team of teenage lords with attitude.' Puck chants an incantation and suddenly in four castles across Scotland, the heirs to the major clans are enveloped in a beam of light and transported to the fairy realm where Oberon grants them the power to morph into mighty ra—"

"Wait, wait, teenage lords with attitude?" Hiccup had to stop him there. "Are you writing yourself into your own made up story?" He spoke slowly, to see if he caught on to how wrong that idea sounded. Ian tended to come up with pretty weird imaginary tales, but as long as no one real was involved, Hiccup didn't really mind. To add real people to fake stories was just asking for trouble in his opinion.

Ian looked offended. "First of all, this will not be a simple campfire story. It's intended for the theater. Live action, you know what I mean? Second, it's not me, just a reasonable facsimile to spice things up a bit."

"What in Thor's name does live action mean?" Hiccup stopped, pinched the bridge of his nose and breathed deeply. Conversations with the Macintosh heir always tended to veer wildly out of control into tangents if he let them. He needed to stay on track. "You know what? Never mind, I don't want to know. I came here to ask you a very important favor."

Ian was suspicious for a moment but motioned for him to continue.

"I've been hearing that there have been Viking attacks lately and I'm afraid someone might try to use that to make things difficult for the peace talks, I want to investigate and find out all that I can."

"You think there might be a saboteur?" Ian asked him seriously, it was a serious accusation.

Hiccup gave him a helpless look. "I don't know, it's just that I've been here for a while now and I don't feel like I've done anything to help Berk; maybe I can find out something to help speed things along." He deliberately didn't mention that he was ordered to investigate.

"You are overstepping your boundaries, my friend," Ian warned him. "As princes, our main roles are as pawns on the board, pieces to be moved to the benefit of others. It is not yet time to make an impact; you should let the grownups handle the politics and enjoy your youth."

"I'm not a prince, Ian." Hiccup deadpanned. "And neither are you for that matter."

The Scottish teen scoffed and put away his sword, taking the conversation a little more seriously. "Don't delude yourself. You are being given a chance, a small chance admittedly, of ruling this kingdom." He gestured all around them. "You're living in a castle where regular folks can't simply be in without being given a spear to stand guard or a broom to start cleaning. You share your meals with the King and Queen." He pointed in the direction of the throne room. "And, whether or not it's your intention, you are courting their daughter, we all are. For all intents and purposes, you are a prince."

Hiccup was taken back by the argument but decided he had more important matters to deal with for the moment. "That's not important right now. Listen, I normally wouldn't bother in asking anyone for help in a situation like this but, if I simply show up, I'm just going to make it worse becauseâ€¦"

"Because they will connect you with the attacks!" Ian finished for him. "So you need someone there to vouch for you. No, better yet, you need to pass unseen, unnoticed." His eyes sparkled. "That would require thatâ€¦ yes, and a cover story, no! Two cover stories." The long haired Scot suddenly adopted a solemn demeanor. "You were right to come to me for help. I will have everything ready by tomorrow." He immediately ruined his serious image by practically skipping to go do whatever it was he interpreted from the conversation. "You won't regret this!" He shouted right before he disappeared down a corridor.

Hiccup hung his head. "I'm way past regret by this point," he commented to himself. "I just hope the embarrassment is minimal."

XxX

Elinor Dunbroch, Queen of Scotland, found herself roaming the empty halls of her castle in the middle of the night. Try as she might, she could not get her earlier conversation with the young Haddock heir out of her head. Would the Lords truly keep their word when so much was on the line? Would She? Thinking back on it, she could not deny that it was that same burden that made her push the engagement even when she knew her daughter was not yet ready for it. Both bad and good came from it; if being turned into a bear was not a wake up call, then nothing was. On the other side, she got the confirmation she needed that her daughter would be a wonderful Queen someday, that alone was worth a hundred hexes.

The Queen's train of thought was interrupted by faint noises in the distance. The kitchens. She quickly determined their origin and decided to investigate; as she drew nearer and was able to hear better, she was surprised at the speakers. Hiccup andâ€¦ Merida? and at the sound that accompanied their talk, laughter.

"â€¦ but she's a girl, Gobber!" Hiccup was making voices. "And then he said. ' Don't worry, she's not gonna look like one. Magnus it is!'"

Merida was holding her sides from laughing so hard.

"Later that night, my father told me that she did look like a Magnus; one of the twins said she looked more like a bunch of sticks wrapped in bacon."

Merida almost fell out of her chair at that. "That's horrible." She couldn't stop laughing.

"Being pretty has never been very high on a Viking's priorities, so she'll be fine." Hiccup downed a gulp of some unspecified liquid.

"Neither is bathing, if me Dad's war stories are accurate."

"Give me a break; you try living for months on end with a raiding party. Tight quarters, little water, and practically no personal space will make anyone smell like he died a month ago and just didn't notice."

"A bet they can use it as a weapon too. Hard to defend yerself when yer fainting from the stench."

It was Hiccup's turn to laugh. "Making the enemy uncomfortable is a perfectly valid tactic, I suppose."

"That's nothing," Merida bragged. "Me dad once told me that in the days before me grandfather, people fought buck naked. How's that fer uncomfortable?"

Hiccup smiled. "Maybe we should combine tactics. If we could gather an army of naked smelly men, we'd be unstoppable."

Elinor heard her daughter spit out whatever she was drinking and snort in laughter. She palmed her face and quietly walked away. "You are more dangerous than you realize, Master Haddock," she whispered softly to herself.

* * *

><p>I wish I could blame the delay in posting on having little time, family obligations, or even on my Beta's epic struggle with her Internet provider. Unfortunately, I had the most severe case of writer's block in regard to this chapter, hell, block seems to soft a word; it was more like a freaking brick wall!

**Merry Christmas everybody! **

16. Chapter 16

Happy New Year everybody! As a new year's eve present I give to you this chapter, fresh off theâ€¦ what? What do you mean it's not New Year's Eve? It's the what? How long have I been unconscious? That doesn't add up! Oh right, the booze. Well, maybe not that fresh anymore, but if you haven't read it, it's new to you! Enjoy. How did I even get Samoan tribal tattoos on 45% of my body anyway? Well, that makes sense.

**Two thousand and fourteen thanks to bast4 who corrected all my

badly written shenanigans.**

How to Train Your Dragon and Brave 2012 are not owned by me. I can see how you could make that mistake since I clearly put the two franchises in my letter to Santa Claws. They were clearly marked, _clearly marked!_ I'm keeping my eye on you, fat man!

* * *

><p>Chapter 16<p>

Hiccup was having second thoughts about letting Ian have free reign of the details of their jaunt to the attacked villages. It wasn't a lack of trust; it was more that his enthusiasm made him edgy. For that, he had the perfect solution. An audience, he had noticed that the Macintosh heir acted differently depending on who he was with and he intended to use that to his advantage. Unfortunately, the list of appropriate candidates was minute: Doric, who he couldn't find, Merida, who seemed to be in a really bad mood so he didn't ask andâ€|

"William! Sorry to barge into your room like this, but I'm having an outing with Ian and I need you along so he doesn'tâ€| goâ€| overboardâ€|"

Hiccup's train of thought was brought to a halt when he saw the contents of the Dingwall heir's room. The walls were completely covered with paintings. Some were landscapes, some were of the royal family, and he was even in a few of them, there were also an alarming number of paintings of the twins. Riding on their dragon, fighting with their father, fighting with each other, throwing him off a cliffâ€| and in what looked like a place of honor was that painting he made during their trip. Doric bound on the ground, the triplets standing triumphant on top of him and the twinsâ€|

"Are thoseâ€| breasts?" Yep, a closer glance revealed that Tuffnut indeed had breasts. He was about to tell the young Dingwall that Tuffnut was a guy when he wisely decided that he didn't want to touch that particular misunderstanding with a ten foot pole. "You know what? I suddenly remembered that I have to be somewhere else, urgently." He bolted.

XxX

Walking quickly through the castle, Hiccup tried unsuccessfully to dispel the images he had just witnessed from his mind. Distracted as he was, he almost didn't notice when the Queen addressed him in a corridor.

"Have a safe trip, Master Haddock. Remember not to overtax yourself." She smiled at him in an almost maternal way that caught him off guard.

"Thank you, your Highness; I'll keep that in mind." He quickened his pace, dreading whatever story Ian had come up with to get them out of the castle for the day. Once outside, he found the Macintosh's heir already waiting for him along with two horses .

"What did you tell people at the castle? Everyone's looking at me funny."

"Not now, I'll tell you on the way there."

Hiccup narrowed his eyes in suspicion but nodded and went to mount his horse.

"Hold on there, buddy! Let's not get on the horses until we get out of view from the castle."

Fifteen minutes later.

"You told them what!?"

Ian spared his walking partner a glance. "I told them that I was going to spend the day teaching you how to ride a horse because you were extremely inept at it and very embarrassed about it."

"And they believed you? Why would they believe you? I can ride on dragons for Thor's sake!" Exasperation colored Hiccup's voice.

"Of course they believed me." Ian looked proud of himself. "Even the king believed my story!"

"I'm starting to think the king would believe the earth is round." Hiccup's tone was as dry as a desert.

"Watch it," Ian warned him. "Besides, it's not that far fetched, I've never seen you even getting close to the horses and you only ride your dragon, which doesn't look that different but I bet is worlds apart from a real horse."

"I don't get close to horses because my clothes smell like Toothless and that spooks them, I had to shower several times and put on fresh clothes."

"Yes, speaking of fresh clothes." Ian reached into the satchel of his horse. "Don't get too comfortable in those." He pulled out a length of cloth and showed it to him.

Hiccup panicked. "Is that a kilt? No, no, no, no, I don't think so. It's not that I have anything against the Scottish people, I just don't have the legs to pull off a skirt."

The other teen rolled his eyes. "For the last time, it's not a skirt. Listen, you are the one that wanted to investigate." He hefted the cloth. "If you don't want this, we should just go to a pub and down a few beers, because I'm not taking you anywhere near the attacked towns dressed like that. You're gonna start the trouble you're trying to prevent."

Leaving the decision to him, Ian's tone made it known that he thought getting drunk was a way better idea. Ten minutes later, a grouchy Hiccup, dressed in a kilt with the colors and pattern of the Macintosh clan, rode at a somewhat slow pace next to a fighting to control himself Ian Macintosh. "I can't believe you talked me into wearing a dress."

Ian lost his battle with laughter. "Don't try to pin this on me; I wanted to go to a pub, remember? What surprises me is that you're getting the hang of riding a horse pretty easily."

The praise didn't cheer Hiccup up. "What part of _I ride dragons_ don't you people understand?" he grumbled, not mentioning that he _was_ having trouble with his horse. It wasn't a matter of balance or that he was so close to the ground, because doing tricks on Toothless and dragonboarding down snowy hills at breakneck speeds had cured him of that. No, it was more of a control issue. When riding a dragon, especially with Toothless, you formed a partnership with it where neither was above the other one, you could give orders and guide it to where you wanted to go, but at times the dragon simply knew best and would take back control. With a horse it was a different set of rules. 'You have to show the horse you're the master and control his movements all the time; otherwise it will go out of control.' Ian said to him. 'The horse I got you is the second tamest I could find next to William's, but you will still need to show him you're the boss.' Then he laughed and told him that Dingwall's horse could probably make tea and serve it to him with crumpets.

After some hours, both riders reached the nearest of the attacked towns. They were welcomed at spear point by a group of guards wearing Dunbroch kilts who didn't look too friendly.

"Halt strangers! Wot's yer business in this town?" One of the guards barked out.

"Friendly fellows." Hiccup whispered.

Ian ignored him. "Greetings, my name is Ian Macintosh, I come here representing Clan Macintosh, to assess the situation in this town and determine how much assistance it requires."

"Why would the Macintosh care about this town?" Asked one of the guards, doubt in his voice.

"This town is not under Macintosh control, but that doesn't mean we can't help each other, does it?" Ian winked.

The guards nodded. "T'would be mighty appreciated, me lord; as ye can see, the town got pretty damaged in the battle." One of them motioned the others to stay put. "A'll take ye to the chief's house."

As they were walking through the town, Ian wasted no time looking for information. "What can you tell me about the attack?" It sounded like a demand.

The guard scratched his head in confusion. "T'was the darrest thing, me Lord. From woot we gathered, a bunch o' towns along the coast were attacked at the same time. We all thought we were being invaded again. An then, it all stopped as suddenly as it started."

Ian and Hiccup shared a look; that was strange indeed. When they got to the chief's house, Hiccup frowned at the fact that while it looked fancier than the ones surrounding it, it was completely intact.

"How do A announce yer companion, me Lord?"

"You don't, he's of no consequence." Ian answered the guard and turned to Hiccup. "Go make yourself useful somewhere until I call for you."

"Yes, my Lord." Hiccup bowed, just as they had planned on the way over, acting like one of the many servants that populated the castle.

Ian nodded and entered the chief's house without waiting for the guard to announce him; a gruff shout of 'an who might you be?' was heard soon after.

The guard shook his head and muttered something about nobles before turning in Hiccup's direction. "So, how's it working fer pretty boy over there?"

Hiccup shrugged remembering his cover story. "A job's a job, you know what I mean? I mostly just clean up after him."

"Sounds like women's work," commented the guard.

"Would you trust your daughter around that guy?"

"Good point kid, see ye 'round." The Scottish man snorted and walked away, leaving Hiccup alone to search for clues.

Wandering through the village, Hiccup was starting to notice serious departures from what he knew a raid should do, Gobber and his dad had been adamant that he learned the proper way of raiding when he was little. before all the disappointment. He thought ruefully before banishing those feelings from his mind, his situation wasn't like that anymore. Sifting through the wreckage of a warehouse, he was surprised to find sacks of grain among the rubble.

"Oi! Wot are ye doing over there!?"

Hiccup's investigation was interrupted by a spear wielding Scottish girl that seemed to be about his age. "Just waiting for my master to finish his business."

"An wot business would that be?" Asked the girl, suspicion and curiously in her tone.

Hiccup shrugged. "Beats me, I'm not important enough to know. Does your family own this warehouse?"

She put down the spear wearily. "Aye, wot's left of it anyway."

"It appears you're not in a hurry to rescue what's inside," Hiccup commented. "It's been days since the attack."

The girl turned sad all of the sudden. "Not a lot manpower to spare, them Vikings killed a lot of people. All A can do is guard here with me dad's spear so no one gets no funny ideas."

Hiccup winced at that. "Are you sure they were Vikings?"

The question angered the girl. "Are ye dumb? Wot else could they be?"

Hiccup shrugged. "I don't know, Vikings are hardly the only dangers out there. There's many types of pirates and brigands and, and, ummâ€¦ Danes."

The last part threw the girl off guard. "Danes?"

"It could happen," Hiccup defended sheepishly. "Now that I've said it, I realize it sounds kind of dumb, but it could totally happen."

"Rightâ€| " She was not convinced. "Well, they were Vikings, A saw them meself. All big an hairy an smelly with horns on their heads. Jus' like in me pa's stories." She turned her head away for a moment. "But A don't want to talk about that no more. Wot's yer name, stranger?"

"My name? My name is Hic-" Suddenly stopping, he remembered they never came up with a Scottish sounding name for him; he was just supposed to be some no name servant. He had no choice but to improvise. "Hicmish." He finished lamely.

"That's a funny name."

"It could have been worse." Hicmish shrugged.

"A kind of like it, It's unique." The girl smiled at him. "Wot are ye really doing here, Hicmish?" She asked in a playful conspiratorial tone.

Hiccup put up his most puzzled expression. "I honestly don't know. Ian Macintosh doesn't talk to you much if you're not female."

The girl dropped her spear. "Did ye say Ian Macintosh?" She asked faintly.

"Yes, why?" Hiccup had to cover his ears when the girl squealed and started talking about how she went to see him at the Highlander games and about how handsome and well built he was and about his hair, in her tirade she also mentioned something about a bear but Hiccup wasn't paying attention.

"â€| an A am sure he could have defeated it without messing up his hair." Her hands flew to her head. "How's me hair? A need to get to me house quickly. Don't steal nothing while A'm gone!" She sprinted off.

"Nice talking to you," Hiccup told the empty space where the girl was and continued looking around.

XxX

When Ian Macintosh finished talking with the village chief, he found a small crowd of girls waiting for him outside, he put on his most charming smile and enjoyed the attention. After some sword tricks, reassurances of help from his clan, and one or two promises to come back someday, he set off to find Hiccup, aware that he was being watched and probably followed by some of the girls.

Finding the Viking boy studying some burned wreckage or another, Ian signaled him to his side. "I have seen enough; let us return to the castle."

Hiccup bowed to Ian before they started walking to where their horses were kept. "Yes my Lord." In a lower voice, he asked. "How did it go

with the chief?"

"Oh excellent," He answered in the same low tone. "I fooled the chief into thinking my dad saw business opportunities in this hole in the ground."

Hiccup grimaced. "Harsh."

"Don't feel bad, I'll get my father to send a team of carpenters and establish some trade, they'll do great! More important than that, I got some good information." He gestured to the town around them. "And if hole in the ground wasn't a good description for this place before it was attacked, it certainly is now."

Hiccup certainly couldn't deny that, the little fishing town had been unusually trashed.

"Anyway," Ian continued. "This charming little town had never been targeted by Vikings or any kind of pirate before, because apparently the currents around these parts are rather treacherous and only the locals that know them or expert sailors can navigate them safely. If you ask me, it was way too much work for the small amount of loot they took." The village chief had assured him that they still had plenty of goods to trade left, so it wasn't as if they had been robbed blind in the raid.

Hiccup was frowning in concentration, trying to piece the information together. "There's something wrong in here." He shook his head.

"What are you talking about?" Ian looked at him strangely.

"I talked to several people and the town was definitely attacked by Vikings. However, the more I see of this raid, the less sense it makes!" Hiccup's voice rose a little before he toned it down again.

"It just looks like a typical raid to me." Ian confessed.

"Except for the unnecessary amount of violence I found." Hiccup explained. "I know you guys think we're just blood hungry savages, but raids are not a matter of bloodlust. Lots of Viking clans are located on islands with harsh climates and limited resources, if they don't get enough supplies for the winter, people will starve, die, or starve _and_ die. That's the intent behind raids, food or riches to trade for food." He looked around to make sure no one else was listening. "You set buildings on fire to divert attention, you scream and howl and smash things to intimidate, you fight the defenders but let those that flee go so that fear spreads. Your objective is not to fight; your objective is to take as much as possible as quick as possible. You don't destroy places with food still there, you don't pass up an obvious target like the chief's house simply because it's a little out of the way, you don't kill indiscriminately, it doesn't make sense."

"How do you know all this?" Ian narrowed his eyes.

"I'm the son of a Viking chief; I'm supposed to know this. I'm also supposed to be massive, hairy and aggressive. The important thing here is that the pieces don't add up. So, either the raid was

conducted by someone inexperienced." Hiccup theorized.

"Unlikely, since it would take considerable skill to navigate to and away from here safely." Ian reasoned.

"Or, this wasn't supposed to be a raid at all." Hiccup finished.

Ian's face suddenly illuminated as a thought came to him. "Do you think someone has a grudge against this town? Revenge can make a man do crazy things. Or maybe someone here knows too much and the 'raid' was just a cover to get rid of him!"

"Keep your tone down." Hiccup warned him. "All we have is speculation, and if someone heard us, we could cause panic."

When they reached the stables, Ian was already planning their next move. "We got some good info in this town. I know the next one is farther but if we hurry up, (comma) we could get there and back to the castle before nightfall. What do think, Hiccup?"

Hiccup, however, wasn't paying attention; his entire brainpower was on a pile of discarded weaponry that lay in the corner of one stall. He knew those weapon designs, he grabbed a dagger and tested it against a post, he knew that poor quality of steel.

"I know who did this," he spoke seriously. "Outcasts."

The attacks were made by Outcasts. Ian was right about something; the attacks were a cover up. And with the Outcasts involved, whatever it was, it couldn't be good.

* * *

><p>You guys are awesome; know that it's your comments follows and favs that keep me writing this story. I have a really hard time concentrating on any one thing in particular; I'm usually doing or thinking or planning several things at the same time and tend to go off on tangents (as if you haven't noticed from my little rants).

You keep me on track, that's why there's only this one story in my profile, otherwise I would loose interest and be like one of those authors that have fifteen incomplete stories with only one or two chapters each. I respect those that can pull it off, but I'm not one of those guys.

I hope all of you have a rocking 2014! And if any of you know of a good tattoo removal place near CENSORED, let me know.

17. Chapter 17

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to witness this chapter. Made possible by my beta bast4, a grant by the Oscar Mayer Corporation, and viewers like you. Let us now say grace. Wait, what?

This chapter is brought to you by **_Disclaimer_****.
****_Disclaimer_****, letting people know I own squat since the dawn

of the legal system.**

* * *

><p>Chapter 17<p>

After Hiccup's discovery, they both rode almost nonstop to the castle, almost, because Hiccup took the first opportunity he could to change back into his clothes and discuss how they would present the information to the King and Queen. In the end, they agreed that it would be Ian that who would give them their report. That was fine by Hiccup, who had other concerns, why were the Outcast all the way in Scotland of all places, they could not possibly know he was there. Could they?

They arrived soon after the sun set. Hiccup had a quick dinner in the kitchens and went to the library to try and clear his head. It was there that Merida found him hours later, translating some writings into runes.

"Ye were gone most of the day." Her voice sounded eerily calm, for her anyway.

Hiccup barely spared her a glance. "Ian wanted to see me fall off a horse a bunch of times, so he took me out for riding lessons."

"Sounds amusing," she told him lamely.

"I knew you'd think so," he answered distractedly. "Looked all over the castle for you, didn't find you anywhere."

"A was busy," she told him in a cutting manner. Hiccup kept working on the document and didn't answer back. Eventually curiosity won out and she asked him what he was working on.

"Just some things I think will be helpful back home," He answered in a distracted manner. "Might as well make myself useful while I'm here."

"Have ye ever felt yer only value is to be used?" Merida's tone was serious and sad.

Hiccup didn't even look up. "I'm currently living in a country I don't know, trying to win the hand of someone I had never met before for the purposes of a politically convenient marriage, I'm doing this for reasons that are not all that clear to me. Soooooâ€| no."

She smacked the back of his head. "A am being serious, ye Viking jackass!"

Hiccup closed the book and turned to look at her fully. "What is this really about, princess?"

Merida suddenly found herself shy for some reason. "A don't know how much ye have heard of this but me and me mum did nae get along fer the longest time." She stopped for a moment to gather her thoughts, now was not the time for storytelling. "Everything's fine now, but sometimes a find out about things that make me think me situation's not changed, that A'm jus' a pawn on the game board. Should A jus'

become accustomed to it cause A'm royalty?" She looked frustrated by the concept.

Hiccup shrugged. "I'm not royalty, so I don't really know the answer to that."

Merida rolled her eyes. "But ye still know wot A'm talking about," she countered him. "Yer the son of a chief; yer dad sent ye here cause he thought it would benefit yer village. Yer in the same boat that A am."

Hiccup looked away for a moment. In a way she was right. However, he did not blame his father for his trip to the Highlands. His stay in Scotland was the result of hanging on to a decision he made regarding the dragons and their use. But sometimes, in the middle of the night when he couldn't sleep, he felt as if he had been exiled for standing up for his beliefs. Pushing those thoughts aside, he concentrated on the princess in front of him. "Listen, seriously, I can't really understand your position because being useful is kind of a new thing for me." He shrugged. "Regardless, to me it sounds like what you have is trust issues with the Queen."

Merida reeled back from the comment. "Woot? Nae A don't! It's nae like that, it's jusâ€¦" She deflated. "A don't knowâ€¦" She fell silent.

"Well, I can't help you with that either." He ignored her glare. "I barely remember my mom." Merida's scowl transformed to a sad frown. "But, do you really think the Queen would use you as a pawn in a game?"

"A don't know." She seemed reluctant to admit it. "A love me mum an A know she loves me, but, rarely can an action, word or situation claim a single motivation as its source," she quoted. "Once A'm Queen, it'll be me job to know the motives an impacts of people's actions."

"Sounds like a lonely existence."

"A never minded being alone." Merida's voice grew distant as her focus shifted to something only she could see. "Till A found out A was never alone to begin with."

Hiccup didn't understood what she was talking about, so he steered the conversation back to a part he did. "There will always be people who will try to take advantage of you. I guess that when you're in a position of power you have to be much more careful because the stakes are higher. But all that aside, the question remains. Do you trust the Queen, no, do you trust your mother?"

Merida looked away. "Me mum loves me an A know she would never handle me carelessly, but she's also the Queen. How can A compete with a whole bloody country?"

Hiccup shrugged.

"Marvelous, Woot's the point of being so smart if ye can't answer a simple question?" She huffed, annoyed.

"That's not a simple question," Hiccup complained. It had been a long

day and he was tired. "You want me to pull something out of my ass? Fine, here it is. Toothless and I have been through a lot together, he's my best friend and closer to me than my own father. With that said, we've both done things that have hurt the other, because of circumstances or pride or because we thought it was for the best. It doesn't really matter because there's a line and I would sooner storm Asgard alone and slaughter the gods than cross it, I'm sure Toothless feels the same way." Hiccup's voice was full sincerity. "I'm also sure your mother feels the same about you. Learning to trust is the only way to stave off loneliness, Toothless taught me that."

Hiccup got up from his chair and stretched a little. "It's late and I've had a rough day, let's talk tomorrow, ok? Goodnight princess." He walked away not waiting for a response. Merida's voice stopped him when he reached the library's door.

"Yer me friend, Ye know that? I trust ye." She was surprised by how right it felt to say that.

Hiccup didn't turn to answer her. "You might regret that some day." His tone was serious.

"A don't think A will." Her tone had conviction.

"I pray you're right." He really did.

XxX

Hiccup knew that if he went to bed he would not get a wink of sleep. The day's events had left him with many things to think about and his attempt to drown them out with work had failed miserably because Merida had given him even more material he didn't want roaming around in his brain. Faced with the prospect of a sleepless night, Hiccup did the only activity that never failed to both cheer him up and calm him down; he took Toothless out on a night flight. The dragon was only too eager to comply since as a Nighthfury once the sun fell he was designed to be king.

Hiccup could feel that power as he crossed the night sky at top speed. Unseen by all, he grinned fiercely while he and Toothless did a series of aerial maneuvers at breakneck speed. Up in the sky nothing could touch him, nothing could reach him. There was no Scotland, no Berk, no politics or consequences, only him, Toothless and the sky. Merida had once told him that she felt the same way when racing through the glen on her horse, she told him that at times she felt as if she was flying. He knew by experience that she had no real clue of what flying felt like, because there was nothing remotely like it on land. Maybe one day he would show her.

Wondering for a moment where those thoughts of the princess came from, Hiccup urged Toothless higher and higher until he started to have a little trouble breathing. When he deemed it high enough, he unhooked himself from Toothless's pedal, gave the dragon a few pats, and let himself fall. Freefalling to what could very well be his death, Hiccup was finally able to clear his mind of everything that wasn't the here and the now. Nothing existed except the sensation of falling and the cold biting wind buffeting him from all directions. He was sure that if there was daylight the view would be properly terrifying, but at the moment, there was only an infinite void all around him, and he felt surprisingly fine with that. After what felt

like an eternity, Hiccup felt Toothless's paws grab his sides; the dragon did the aerial equivalent of a summersault and threw his rider in what seemed to be a random direction. Hiccup felt the world spin out of control for a moment before he found himself sitting on Toothless saddle; he instinctually hooked himself to the steering pedal and made his ride level out before gaining altitude once more.

The dragon gave an annoyed grunt that made Hiccup smile and scratch him behind his earflaps. Giving a strange nearly soundless roar, Toothless dived into the forest, zigzagging between the trees. Hiccup, recognizing that his sight would be of no help, closed his eyes and concentrated on the all the small cues he received from the dragon about how to move. A muscle twitch here, a small twist of the neck, a change in the angle of his posture, Hiccup recognized them all and operated the tailfin accordingly, practically becoming an extension of his friend. Once out of the forest, Toothless did a series of spins to express contentment, he wanted to roar and shoot a few plasma blasts but he knew Hiccup wouldn't appreciate that right now, so he did the next best thing, he speed up.

Unfortunately a dragon couldn't fly forever and the ride eventually had to end. Hiccup didn't mind, Astrid had cured him of that running away from his problems phase he once had. So when Toothless landed at the shores of the Loch Ness, Hiccup no longer needed the thrill of flight to keep his mind focused. The Night Fury wandered off to find a nice spot and started rolling around in the grass once he found it. Hiccup sat down close by and watched his friend enjoy himself. Everything good on his life had started with that black dragon and Hiccup knew that he owed him more than he could ever pay. Even now, he helped him. Seeing his flying partner so happy and content with the feeling of grass and dirt beneath him, Hiccup was reminded that while life may not always go his way, there was always something to enjoy and take comfort in.

Heartened with this knowledge, his gaze traveled over the Ness. He had heard rumors that the gigantic lake was magical, that it housed all kinds of magical creatures; Hiccup could certainly believe that as he could faintly hear a soft crooning in the distance. Toothless didn't seem to mind it as he continued frolicking in the grass so Hiccup knew that it wasn't a danger to him. Curious, he imitated the croon as best he could and waited for a response; he got one in the form of a second croon, this one carrying a tint of curiosity with it. Encouraged by this, he repeated the croon, trying to make his voice as gentle as possible. The reply he got was different this time. Coming from another direction, an angry roar was his answer. Toothless reacted immediately, springing to a defensive position and roaring back as fiercely as he could.

Hiccup had no idea what manner of creature made those crooning noises, a mermaid perhaps? Or maybe one of those Selkies he had heard so much about; it didn't matter, because he did know what made that roar. A dragon, he didn't know what kind of dragon it was, but judging by how far away and how loud it sounded, he could tell that it was big, and by the pitch he could tell that it was angry, angry and something else he could not identify. Hiccup knew that, the dragon would eventually become a problem; a problem he would have to deal with. He was okay with that. However, for the moment, failing to hear an answering roar to Toothless's challenge, he realized that he was being let go with a warning this time. He was okay with that

too.

* * *

><p>I have absolutely nothing funny to say today, nothing at all. At least there's a new chapter up, right? That's got to count for something, righth?. Leave some feedback if it pleases you, it certainly pleases me.

Peace.

18. Chapter 18

Many thanks to my beta bast4 for making sure I don't get kicked out of the Internet for writing with too many mistakes. Which is totally a thing, it happened to my friend's cousin, or was that my cousin's friend? No matter, the important thing is that I'm not making stuff up. I think.

I do not own either HTTYD not Brave 2012, not even a little.

* * *

><p>Chapter 18<p>

Breakfast was a tranquil affair with the people at the table barely talking to each other. Afterwards, and much to Merida's relief, it was Hiccup's turn for some morning lessons with the Queen. Hiccup didn't have the heart to tell the Queen that he probably knew more about trigonometry and its practical uses than her, so he just went along with it.

"The young Lord Macintosh told Fergus and I about your little escapade yesterday." Elinor commented in a distracted manner during the lesson.

Hiccup responded with a vaguely inquisitive grunt to let her know he was paying attention, even though he wasn't.

"He told us about how he had tricked you into going to an attacked village in order to fish for facts that might be useful, he came up with some interesting pieces of information."

"Sounds like a very shrewd move," Hiccup noted, wondering where this was going.

"Ian Macintosh is not that smart." Elinor's tone left no room for discussion.

Hiccup did it anyway. "Could have fooled me, I get a headache almost every time I speak with him."

"Those are cultural idiosyncrasies, Master Haddock. You are smart enough to know that." Elinor's voice never lost its casual tone, as if she was talking about picking berries in the spring.

XxX

"I need more heat over here!"

"It's nae designed to do tha'. A don' have th' power, lad!"

"Close all middle vents! We'll use bellows on the first and eighth intakes to create a stronger current."

"It's nae working!"

"We need to get a good rhythm going! There it goes! It's almost there, just a little more!"

"It's starting to shake! The forge cannae take much more o' this, lad. She's gonna blow!"

Hiccup nodded. "Open up all intakes, let it cool down!"

Montgomery was near tears as he quickly went to work to salvage what he could. "Me bairns! Me poor bairns!"

Hiccup for his part was looking at the smoking forge, trying to piece something together in his mind. "That could have gone better," he helpfully commented.

"Gone better? Gone better!?" Montgomery was furious. "Ye destroyed me livelihood! Do ye know how much work it cost to make one o' this forges?"

"We can make another one." Hiccup tried to console him. "There are all kinds of blueprints of forges in Goober's travel journals, I'm sure we can come up with something worth while." Hiccup winced when Montgomery let the tools he was using clatter on the ground and turned to look at him with a stern expression on his face.

"Wot did ye jus' say?"

Hiccup took a step back. "That we can make another one."

"After that." Montgomery walked towards the young Viking.

"Something worth while?"

"Before that, ladd." Montgomery's serious tone didn't change.

"About the blueprints?" Hiccup didn't get it.

"The next part."

"Travel journals?"

"Whose travel journals?" The Scott was losing his patience.

"Gobber," Hiccup warily said, trying to discreetly inch toward the exit. "He's the blacksmith in my village. I'm his apprentice."

"Yer the apprentice of Gobber the Belch?" Montgomery's bushy mustache twitched.

"Yes, yes I am." Preparing to make a hasty escape in case Montgomery's demeanor turned violent, what Hiccup didn't expect was

for the Scotsman to laugh out loud and give him a big hug.

"Gobber's apprentice. A should have known! That basterd's still wrecking me possessions an he's not even on t' same land mass!"

"Wait, wait, wait. You know Gobber?"

Montgomery's eyes shined with nostalgia. "Of course A know Gobber! We were crewmen on a ship called the Venture, under the command of captain Dirk Shatter. Back then A was known as Monty the Scott, but people jus called me Scotty." After that, Montgomery eagerly told Hiccup about some of their adventures. It seemed that the old Scotsman was only too happy to remember his glory days as an explorer, which served Hiccup just fine as it meant he wasn't going to get mangled.

XxX

Walking back to the castle, Hiccup was glad to notice that after a couple of days of coming and going to the village people largely ignored him now. While he never felt any hostility directed towards him like he still sometimes felt in the castle; he was glad that once the novelty of his presence had died out so did the interest in him. Hiccup theorized that nobody in town believed he was a Viking. _They probably believe I'm just some weirdo who likes to dress funny._ He gave a small mental shrug. _Or the servant of some foreign Lord. Advantages of not looking stereotypical I suppose._

The young Viking's train of thought was interrupted when someone grabbed the back of his tunic and dragged him to an alleyway. Hiccup struggled with his captor but was quickly outmaneuvered by his assailant who hoisted him up by the neck of his vest and propped him against a wall.

Once he saw his attacker, Hiccup's incredulous words matched his attacker's angry ones. "What are /you/ doing here?"

"I asked first Haddock, spill it."

"We both asked at the same time," replied Hiccup, who after the initial shock wore off, didn't seem too concerned.

The other person shook him a bit to remind him of his position. "Stop giving me a hard time and tell me!"

"I'm here as a gesture of good will during the peace negotiations." It was the simplest explanation he could think of. "Now it's your turn. Why are you here, Heather?"

The peasant clothing she wore had fooled him for about half a second, but she still had that long dark hair and sharp hawk like features. Not to mention a charming Viking like disposition when upset and an inclination to manhandle him that were dead giveaways.

Heather glared at him "I'm on Alvin the Treacherous's black list. Why do you think I'm here?" She shook him a bit. "Me and my family are in hiding in the one place Vikings normally don't go. Except /you're/ here!" Her glare intensified.

An apologetic half shrug was all Hiccup could manage from his position. "Hate to say this to you, but as far as Alvin's kill list is concerned, I'm betting you're pretty low on that totem pole."

"Well, my father was not willing to take that bet. Can you blame him? The moment that man gets bored he probably sends his henchmen to fetch him people who've pissed him off in the past."

"I don't know him that well, but he does seem the type." Hiccup conceded the point.

Heather's reply was preempted by someone clearing his throat. They both turned their heads to see Ian Macintosh casually leaning against a wall with a giant grin on his face. "Is this a Viking courting ritual? Because it's very entertaining."

"No!" They both answered at the same time before pausing in thought.

"Well, sometimes." Hiccup admitted.

"It's been known to happen." Heather completed the thought.

"Is it happening now?" To say Ian was amused would be an understatement.

"No!" They both answered in chorus.

"Do you mind?" Hiccup addressed Heather, asking her to put him down. She nodded and let go, causing him to stumble when he landed. He quickly stood between the two teens. "Heather, this is Ian Macintosh, heir of the Macintosh clan. Ian, this is Heather. She's a friend?" He turned towards Heather. "Are we friends?"

She shrugged.

"Well, she's kind of a friend, more like a friend of a friend acquaintance kind of thing. She's in hiding because she got in a bit of trouble with the Outcast tribe some time ago."

"Trouble which /you/ made worse, by the way." Heather glared at him.

"Don't give me that look," Hiccup shot back annoyed. "Alvin would have gotten rid of you and your parents even if you had fulfilled your end of the bargain. They call him the Treacherous for a reason."

That statement took some of the wind out of her sails. "I know that." She slumped for a moment in defeat. "And I'm grateful to you guys, I really am. It's just a bit difficult to adapt. Everything is so different here; Mom and I can't help Father with his work, everyone expects me to act meek, and do you know how annoying it is to wear a dress?"

"Yes." Hiccup deadpanned.

Heather wasn't listening. "Because it's just as fun as a dip in the Nāströnd. It's hard enough fitting in without those rumors that a

Viking prince was staying at the castle, which in hindsight I should have realized it was you, keeping me on edge."

Hiccup's incredulous 'What?' and Ian's triumphant 'Told you.' Canceled each other. Turning to face Heather, Hiccup decided to deal with the more immediate matter. "I'm sorry you and your family are having a rough time. You should have gone to Berk, we would have gladly welcomed you."

Heather crossed her arms in annoyance. "That's a great idea, hiding from Alvin in the one place he wants to destroy the most. At least here we're safe from the Outcasts."

Ian coughed nervously at that last part while Hiccup looked away with an uncomfortable expression on his face. Heather caught on immediately. "What are you not telling me? Spill it."

Hiccup reached behind him and pulled out a crude looking dagger. She recognized it immediately. "There have been a series of attacks along the coast by Outcasts raiding parties. Nothing to lose any sleep over." He was quick to assure her.

Heather hung her head in frustration. "Are you that naïve? It's obvious that they came here for you."

"No they didn't. They have no way of knowing I'm here."

She sighed tiredly. "The Outcasts are more resourceful than what you give them credit for. Just be careful, alright? I would hate to see Astrid sad because you were careless."

"I will," Hiccup told her. "And remember, if you need help, all you need to do is ask."

Heather gave him a small tired smile before facing Ian and curtsying for the young lord and finally leaving, the self assured stride of a Viking transforming into the flighty steps of a village girl. She exited the alleyway and disappeared, blending perfectly with the crowd.

Ian was left staring, mesmerized. "That girl is a fantastic actor."

Hiccup shook his head in amusement. "You have no idea. What are you doing in town, anyway?" he asked, hoping to change the subject.

Ian's mind switched gears instantly. "Oh, I just had to tell you! I had the most brilliant idea from our adventure yesterday."

Hiccup's left eyebrow rose in confusion. "Adventure? We just went to—"

"Picture this. A rugged ex soldier and a somewhat frail scholar, two friends living together on a street famous for its bakers. They make their living solving crimes too difficult for the authorities; they do this by investigating small seemingly inconsequential clues that other people miss."

Hiccup was growing accustomed to the other teen's eccentricities, but

he still had to ask. "Why do they live on a street of bakers?"

"That's just fluff to round out the characters. The audience loves that, trust me."

"Rightâ€¦ Didn't you have a crime solving story, play, whatever you call them, already?" Hiccup started walking away.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Ian followed him confused.

"The one with the talking bear," Hiccup clarified. He was uncomfortable with having another fictional character loosely based after him (1), he had to nip this at the bud.

"Oh, that!" Ian perked up. "Princess Merida chased me around the castle with an axe until I agreed to drop it."

"So that's what that was." Hiccup nodded in recognition, so much for that idea. "Shame, I actually kind of liked that one."

Ian shrugged. "I was running out bear puns anyway."

XxX

That night while scouring through Gobber's journals trying to find about his time aboard the Venture, Hiccup was sidetracked by something else that drew his eye, a crude drawing of a Yak.

Following hearsay of an ancient land with all sort of fantastic dragons, I arrived at a hellish mountain range that separates me from my goal. What started as a simple journey has become a very dangerous adventure worthy of a Viking. After weeks of travel, I arrived half dead at a small village. It was there that I found a most unusual creature, a non hammerhead version of the being that saved me from the Boneknapper. It was sort of a hairy cow with long horns, the people here call them Yaks and they are really, really useful. Their fur is warm and their meat it delicious, they give milk and even their poop is used as fuel! I am now convinced that Thor sent that Hammerhead Yak so that I would live enough to bring these animals back home.

I am now farthest inland than I have ever traveled before, and if I go back, I don't think I can ever get this far again. As depressing that sounds, a herd of these creatures could help Berk immensely, this is just too good to pass on. I have decided to stay here for a while in order to recover my strength and to try to get as many of these Yaks as I can. I'm not really sure how I'm gonna do that or make the trip back home with a herd of these things, but I'm sure something will come up.

Hiccup closed the journal, as interesting as that was he really needed to get some sleep.

* * *

><p>It bothers me a little that there are Yaks on Berk. How did they get all the way there? Well, now we know Gobber took them there when

he couldn't pass the Himalayas.<p>

* * *

><p>1- The first being the Dragon Conqueror.<p>

* * *

><p>Wild PROCRASTINATION appeared!

Go! Writer!

What will WRITER do?

WRITER uses HEROIC RESOLVE!

**It doesn't affect Wild PROCRASTINATION!

Wild PROCRASTINATION used LACK OF TIME!

It's super effective!

WRITER uses CHECK REVIEWS!

Wild PROCRASTINATION fainted!

Player defeated Wild PROCRASTINATION.

WRITER gained XXX EXP. Points!

You got NEW CHAPTER for winning!

19. Chapter 19

Long time no see, uh guys. Hopefully the contents of the chapter will make it up to you. All of the thanks to Heartlessly Awesome, who's awesome beta powers (witch is totally a thing) allowed me to post this on my birthday.

That's right, it's my birthday! Yay! I of course accept gifts of any kind. Cash, electronics, jewellery, even franchises like HTTYD and/or Brave 2012, which I don't currently own are welcomed.

* * *

><p>Chapter 19<p>

During the next week, Hiccup spent most of his time working in the smithy. He and Montgomery had managed to repair the forge enough so that it was usable again. Once that was done, they spent most of the time they got between clients, designing a new forge from Gobber's notes that would satisfy both their needs.

For Hiccup, it was a welcomed reprieve from life at the castle. Nothing soothed his homesickness like blacksmithing work. Gobber's workshop served as his refuge for many years. He was past that now, but it was still a good way to occupy his mind.

This rhythm of activity continued until Merida herself went to drag

him out of the workshop. When she got there, she found him hunched over a table fiddling with some contraption. Unlike the other times she had caught him working on something, this time he noticed her presence immediately and faced her with a smile.

"Welcome to Monti's Workshop. How can I help? Oh, hello princess! What a surprise!"

Merida took in his appearance; there was no sign of royalty or pretention anywhere on him. He wasn't using his vest, and without it, he looked taller for some reason; bigger. There was some soot staining his face making his eyes stand out. She frowned. "Surprise? We've hardly seen each other this week and that's all ye can say?"

Hiccup shrugged. "I've been busy helping Montgomery with the forge, so my free time is limited."

Merida made a show of sweeping her gaze across the empty workshop; the only thing missing was tumbleweed. "A can see that."

He chuckled. "Believe it or not, we've been really busy this week. Rumor spread that Montgomery got himself an apprentice from some faraway land and we've been getting a steady influx of curious people disguised as customers." He frowned. "I'm actually beginning to think Monty started the rumors himself to get more business."

She nodded. That sounded like something he would do. Her amusement was cut short when a detail suddenly stood out to her. "Wait, some faraway land? Ye mean nae one knows yer a Viking?"

"An advantage of not being a mighty mountain of muscle wearing a horned helmet is that my Viking-hood is not readily apparent." He shrugged. "And since we've had so many customers, we don't have time to sit around and chatter, so they leave equally ignorant. The shop's closed today because we were gonna work on the new forge, but Montgomery had to go take care of a situation with his family; he should be back in a few hours. I'm using the breather to work on an idea I had the other day."

"That doohickey?" She pointed at the worktable.

"The technical term is thingamabob, nice try. Wait don't touch that!"

The warning came too late as Merida, curious as to what the odd mess of rope of wire and metal was, picked it up and shook it lightly. The machine vibrated for a moment before it shot a myriad of ropes in every direction that quickly ensnared the two teens, slammed them together and wrapped tightly around them. Hiccup, unable to keep his balance with the sudden change in momentum sent the both of them tumbling to the ground.

"Off! Get off of me!"

"I don't know if you noticed, but I kind of can't."

Merida grunted. "Yer all noodlely, how can ye weigh this much?"

"Awesomeness," Hiccup deadpanned. "Wait, what are you doing? Stop!"

Merida didn't listen and kept trying to wiggle free or break the ropes, unaware that she was rubbing herself all over Hiccup.

"Will you stop that already? You're not going to break the ropes." His voice cracked.

"Then do something, cause this is uncomfortable!" She snapped.

"I can't break the ropes either," he responded. "Help me roll us over. At least that way I won't crush you with my manly Viking body."

Merida snorted and complied, anything was better than having someone pressing down on her. When she did, Hiccup discovered the one flaw in his plan. With the princess on top of him he could feel the soft curves of her body much more clearly than in their previous position. And with their faces inches apart he couldn't look at anything besides her eyes because her hair had draped all around their heads, effectively blocking them from the rest of the world with a cascade of red curls, there was nowhere to turn to.

"So, ummâ€¦ Nice weather we're having."

Merida gave him an incredulous look. "Really?"

"Too lame?" Hiccup would have scratched his head if he could.

Merida nodded, but stopped when she almost kissed him

Hiccup didn't notice. "I'm kind of new at speaking inches away from someone's face. What would be a better conversation? Maybe if you'd tell me why you came here in the first place?"

The question took away Merida's embarrassment and replaced it with annoyance. "Wot do ye mean; Wot am A doing here? Ye're gone all the time and A've barely seen ye all week, can't A miss me friend a little?"

"You can," Hiccup admitted. "But I think you value your alone time too much to just pop up and visit with such a flimsy excuse."

"Fine," She huffed. "Since yer nae longer taking lessons with me mum, she's been spending all that free time doubling me lessons so A don fall behind."

"That sounds harsh," Hiccup admitted. "It would sound harsher if I didn't know that the Queen cut your lessons in half when she started tutoring me."

She had the decency to look a little sheepish. "Can't a girl want some free time?"

Hiccup chuckled at that. "Can't fault you that. Is that why you're here, to ask me to distract the Queen?"

Merida shook he head, making the curtain of fire dance around them.

"Nae really, Mum asked me to fetch ye fer lunch."

"Is something the matter?" Hiccup's face showed worry for a second.

"Nae that A know of. She's probably gonna try to convince ye to take classes again." She reasoned.

"I would if could," Hiccup freely admitted. "But I will be too busy for the foreseeable future."

"Wot is taking ye so long anyway? A thought yer foot was fine now an the replacement wasn't urgent."

Hiccup started to explain but was cut off by Merida. "Don' explain. It's probably all boring and logical. Anything interesting while ye've been holed up here?"

"I heard that a band of brigands were slaughtered, it was the talk of the town for a few days. That's interesting, I guess."

Merida tried to shrug but couldn't, instead she closed her eyes and started leaning forward, slowly.

Hiccup's eyes widened. "What are you doing?" There was a slight tint of panic in his voice.

"Don get exited, big boy," He heard her say. "This position is cramping me neck something fierce." She moved her head several ways before finding a comfortable position on the crook of his neck.

Hiccup swallowed hard and kept himself very still as his world turned red when Merida's plentiful curls landed on his face. He started blowing on them, to get them out of the way.

Merida's face matched the color of her hair almost perfectly as she lay there on top of her friend nuzzling his neck. He smelled of charcoal and metal and of something else she could not identify. She found herself surprised that she didn't find it unpleasant. "Talk to me about something?" She asked him, her voice becoming a little husky. Anything to get my mind off this situation. She thought.

Hiccup shuddered as he felt Merida's breath on his neck and wracked his brain for something to say. He settled on an early memory, "Once upon a time," he ignored her snort at the fairytale sounding dialogue. "Before time was time, there was an age when nothing existed; there was no sand, nor sea, nor cool waves. No earth nor sky nor grass. Only Ginnungagap, the great yawning gap. Ginnungagap was between Muspelheim, a fiery world inhabited by fire giants and Nifheim, a world of eternal ice and mist, homeland of the ice giants."

"Woot is it with ye north men an giants?" Merida murmured.

"Oh, hush. If you must know, the term 'giants' refer to beings whose powers equal that of the gods but are not gods themselves, and yes some of them are gigantic in stature. Now, where was I? Oh, yea! The icy mist from Nifheim and the billowing flames from Muspelheim

crept towards each other until they met in the center of Ginnungagap. The fire melted the ice and the resulting water drops formed themselves into Ymir the first of the-

"Giants?"

"Who's telling the story here?" Hiccup complained. "But yes, he was the first of the giants, and when he sweated, more giants were born from his sweat."

"Sounds gross," She commented.

"Ymir was created from magical water, so his sweat was probably the same magical water that created him and could create more giants."

"Sounds logical to me," She teased him.

"You want to hear the story or not?" She nodded and Hiccup suppressed a shudder at the sensations that created, he quickly started talking again. "As the frost continued to melt, a cow, Audhumbla, emerged from it. She fed Ymir with milk and fed by licking the salt in the ice. Her licks slowly uncovered Buri, the first of the Aesir: the tribe of the gods. Buri had a son named Bor, who married Bestla, the daughter of the giant Bolthorn. From the union of these two Odin, the half god half giant ruler of the Aesir, was born. When Odin grew up, he slew Ymir and crafted the world out of his corpse. He created the seas from his blood, the soil from his skin and his muscles, the vegetation from his hair. He formed the sky out of his skull making four dwarfs that correspond to the cardinal points held Ymir skull high above the earth, he also made the clouds from his brain, which leads me to believe Ymir wasn't very smart."

With his face completely red from the sensation of the princess's face touching the side of his face and his neck, Hiccup idly noted that for someone with such a rough personality, Merida had very soft skin. Shaking those thoughts out of his head, he continued his narration. "The gods eventually formed the first man and women named Ask and Embla from two tree trunks that washed up on a beach in the recently created land. Odin endowed the newly created humans with life, spirit and inspiration and gave them Midgard to live in, creating a fence around it made out of Ymir eyebrows to protect it from giants and from monsters from the other realms. We call the area inside this fence, which surrounds both Asgard and Midgard, Innangard. Utangard is our word for that which outside, lawless worlds. Our elders tell us this tale to teach us one basic principal of life in general and Viking existence in particular: Creation doesn't spring from nothingness, all life feeds on death. To create something, you need to destroy what came before, and no one is better at destruction than a Viking. To make a sword I destroy the ore to get to the iron inside, for a new idea to take hold I must destroy an old one, even now to speak to you I'm destroying the silence of the shop and a rather awkward moment."

He sighed noisily. _And for a shot at peace I destroyed every chance I ever had to get together with Astrid_. He knew that when the princess didn't choose him he could not go back to Astrid, simply because it would be seen as an insult to her family. _Vikings truly are masters at destruction_. Hiccup's musings were interrupted when he heard a soft snore come from his lovely companion. "I'm not that

boring, am I?" He asked to no one in particular, his response was the even breathing of the girl above him. "At least I know your opinion on the subject." She snorted softly in her sleep. However, unbeknownst to him, and contrary to his beliefs, Merida didn't fall asleep because of boredom, but because it was surprisingly comfortable atop the young Viking. He was warm and his voice, even if it cracked now and then, was oddly reassuring and slowly lulled her into sleep. Hiccup sighed and continued speaking, more for his sake now than hers. He spoke about the realms and about the gods, he spoke about legends and stories from his home, about dragons and sea monsters, he even spoke about Berk and about himself. He talked about anything he could think off to keep his mind occupied and away from the curvy redhead on top of him.

After what felt like hours but in reality was, well, hours; Hiccup felt himself break into cold sweat when he heard the door to the smithy open, he just hoped that whoever it was wouldn't overreact and kept his mouth shut. A shill went down his spine at the throaty mischievous chuckle of the intruder.

"Well, well, well, what do we have here?"

* * *

><p>All the information on Norse Mythology I parroted and slightly modified in this chapter were taken from the good folk on [norse-mythology**dot**org](http://norse-mythology.org) **Norse Mythology for smart people. It's a pretty cool site, you should check it out.**

The fact that I posted chapters during two of my birthdays means that I've been writing this story for more than a year. That totally blows my mind! I wouldn't had made it this far without your support, thank you.

Well, you might have wondered about the lack of updates lately, and I have to tell you. The darnedest thing happened to me; Someone shot my procrastination in the face, and for some reason there were skittles all over the floor, it was all very weird.

I know what you're thinking. Isn't that a good thing? Well, that depends; in my case, after the funeral was over (close casket because, shotgun). All kinds of things started popping up that I couldn't put off because procrastination was six feet under (plus that whole bit were I need shelter to live in and food to, well... live). After a while I was able to rent a small one to start writing again, but the sucker is asking for pay in reviews. So help a guy out, will you?

20. Chapter 20

Complete and utter thanks to my beta Heartlessly Awesome, who's both Heartlessly and awesome.

Another year has come and gone and I still don't own either HTTYD or Brave 2012. I can't say I'm surprised.

* * *

><p>Chapter 20<p>

Montgomery the Scott, former blacksmith in chief at Dunbroch castle was having one of the most productive yet entertaining weeks he had had in years. With a well-placed comment here and there, his shop had benefited from a steady flow of curious customers hoping to get a glimpse of his foreign apprentice with the flimsiest excuses. Yes, it had been a productive week indeed. Oh sure, it had started rather poorly, with the destruction of his beloved forge. But sorrow soon turned to glee when he learned that the young Viking who wrecked his child was none other than Gobber the Belch's apprentice. A torrent of memories of life at sea assaulted him all at once. Which saved the boy from a few lumps to the head.

Not only had the kid been a great source of information about what his old friend had been up to all these years, apparently the Boneknapper did exist, go figure; he was also a great excuse to travel down memory lane, as he regaled the youth with tales of his adventures under the command of captain Dirk. Gobber had been a rather erratic crewmember, while Montgomery stayed on the ship until Dirk retired and was replaced by some bald French with a penchant for speeches.

As they researched and designed the new forge, he had been surprised that Gobber would trust his travel journals to anyone, since he had always guarded them furiously during their travels; but as the week went on and he saw Hiccup work, a strange realization was becoming apparent to the old seadog, one he doubted Hiccup himself knew. Gobber hadn't been training an apprentice, he was training an heir. He himself had trained a few apprentices over the years and knew how you went about it. You taught them the basics, corrected their flaws, gave them tips and basically let them work for you until you felt they were ready or they struck out on their own. However, when training your heir, that was an entirely different beast. Your heir was supposed to carry on your legacy and then go beyond it, for this you teach him everything you know, all your secrets, techniques, discoveries, and all your experiences. So that he may continue with your work when you pass on. And in Hiccup's work, Montgomery saw Gobber's nuances and rhythms. This struck him as odd, since according to the boy, he was the Chief's son and next in line for the seat. Clearly he was missing something.

It was that puzzling situation that made him think about his decision to make his nephew his heir. The boy was planning to sign on for a tour on the Venture, but seeing Hiccup's work made him realize how behind he was in properly training him. With that in mind he decided to close the shop for one day and go talk with his brother and his family about starting the next part of his nephew's training early. The boy wouldn't like it but he would obey.

All thoughts of family and heirs went out the window when he entered the smithy and was greeted to the sight of the princess and the Viking boy on a pile on the floor, in the middle of what looked to be a passionate embrace. For a split second his reaction was outrage, it quickly transformed to worry when he saw that they were actually tied together. He tensed, ready for anything in case whoever did that tried anything. Before suddenly remembering about a chat he had with the young Viking about a little side project he was fiddling with. His apprehension turned to amusement.

It took Hiccup and Merida almost an hour to compose themselves,

explain the situation to a furiously laughing Montgomery and make him promise to keep his mouth shut. They barely made it in time for dinner where the Queen gave them an even gaze. "You were both supposed to be here hours ago." She gently chided them.

"My fault," Hiccup apologized. "We got tied up at the workshop."

Merida elbowed him in the gut.

Elinor pretended not to notice. "A commendable work ethic," she commented.

Hiccup shrugged. "I just don't like to leave loose ends hanging around."

"I am surprised that my daughter was patient enough to wait until you finished your work." The Queen told him.

"She couldn't get away," He assured her.

Merida smacked the back of his head. "It was boring!" She preferred to tell a little lie than to confess to her mother that she'd spent hours entangled with their Viking guest on the floor of a smithy. She might take it the wrong way.

Hiccup feigned hurt. "Boring? And here I thought I had a captive audience to my genius."

"Ye didn't," she snapped. "Me mum told me to bring ye. An if a hadn't dragged ye out of there ye would still be there wakin on yer anvil."

"We're all bound by our duties, I suppose."

Merida twitched.

Dinner continued normally until it was interrupted by the sound of flapping wings and a sudden weight on Merida's head as a small red shape landed on her. Silence reigned for a moment before the Queen calmly addressed their foreign guest. "Are you expecting a visitor, Master Haddock?"

Hiccup chuckled nervously. "Airmail," he mumbled.

Merida idly pulled the terror from her head, much to the dragon's protests. With the dragon in her arms she noticed that it had a letter and a small gourd tied to its side. She took the letter but couldn't understand the runes, so she gave it to the Viking boy.

Hiccup accepted the letter and wondered who could have sent it. _The writing's not feminine enough to be Fishleg's, so it's probably from Astrid. _A pang of emotion hit Hiccup with that realization. He squashed the feeling and set the letter to his side.

"Aren't ye gonna read it, lad? Fergus asked with more curiosity than Hiccup had ever seen directed his way from the King.

"I don't want to be rude."

"It could be something important, Master Haddock. We do not mind the interruption." The Queen assured him.

Hiccup nodded and opened the letter.

Greetings, Lord Hiccup, Hiccup rolled his eyes, three words in and the letter was already dripping with sarcasm. It was from Astrid, alright. _This letter is meant to test if little red learned the way to Scotland and to you_. _When you receive this, give the little guy a check up and let him rest before you send him back with your reply_.

I wish you would hurry up and seduce that princess already, Seduce? Obviously that girl forgot who she was talking to. _Because we all miss you here in Berk. I'm implementing your advice and it's working beautifully, even the villagers are getting in on the action. Most surprising of all is that Mildew of all people seems to be coming around; he still won't go near the dragons but he's been asking about them and acting more friendly. Not a lot, barely enough to be noticed actually. But, since this is Mildew we're talking about, that's actually a huge leap forward_.

Our little messenger is also carrying a gourd of dragon's breath Gobber made especially for you. He says it's his strongest batch yet and that it will get anyone, even you, drunk as all heck.

On local news. The twins have been complaining that their dad took three ships and went to distract Dagur to stop the armada from sailing to Berk. I wish that I knew more about the situation or that my source of information was more reliable than the twins. For all I know their dad just went ice fishing and they misheard.

With Bork's week fast approaching, your dad asked us to put together a dragon air show. The dragon calls are going to be of great help in putting this together. So hurry up and get married so you and your wife can come and watch the show.

Astrid.

Hiccup smiled, short and to the point; it was good to see that Astrid hadn't changed.

"Is something the matter, Master Haddock?" The Queen asked him.

The young Viking blushed at the question, for a moment he had forgotten where he was. "It's just news from Berk, your Highness, nothing worth repeating."

Fergus Laughed. "Yer not gonna let us hanging, are ye? Ye might as well tell us." The sharpness of his gaze belied the friendliness in his voice.

"Well, ummmâ€¦" He didn't like being put on the spotlight. "Dragon racing is becoming popular." He blurted out.

As soon as he said it, Merida's eyes lit up with interest. "Ye race them like horses?" She started to bounce on her seat in excitement. "Do ye race them by species? Which one's faster? Do _ye_ race? Wot else do ye do with them that's jus for fun?"

Hiccup was impressed by her enthusiasm but not really surprised. Merida adored her horse and she loved going fast. A good chunk of their conversations were about Angus after all.

"Racing like this is recent. I don't know the details because I've been here for a while now. Fastest species? I don't know, some of them are pretty fast. We all time ourselves but I've only raced once."

"Did ye win?" Merida seemed to be expecting a story.

Hiccup shrugged. "Not exactly. I had some trouble with Toothless' tailfin and ended in second place. I got one heck of a consolation prize though." As soon as the words came out of his mouth he mentally winced and quickly changed the subject. "The folks back home are also preparing for the Bork's Week celebrations. The first ones since we made peace with the dragons." He laughed nervously.

"Correct me if I'm wrong." Ian decided to play along; having guessed correctly what the consolation prize was and from whom. "The name of your island is Berk not Bork, correct?"

Hiccup gave him a brief look of gratitude. "Yes, the island's name is Berk. Bork's Week is a celebration on honor of Bork the Bold, the first Viking to ever classify and record the different species of dragons and their behaviors. He wrote the book of dragons which has been vital to our survival for centuries."

"It sounds like an important holiday." Elinor smiled.

"It's right up there with Stump Day."

"Are ye okay with missing it?" Merida asked him.

Hiccup made a face. "It's not really my decision, so that doesn't really matter."

That ended that conversation.

Not sensing the change in mood. The triplets started tugging Hiccup's shirt and pantomiming horns on their heads.

"You want to know if it says anything about the twins?"

They nodded.

"Let me see." He made a show of scanning the letter, already knowing it said nothing. "Here's something: The twins write that they're sorry to have left without saying goodbye, but that the next time they visit they'll teach you even more fun ways to hunt down and tie up Doric."

The young Macguffin's cry of indignation needed no translation. The triplets for their part nodded and raced back to their seats. When everyone returned to their meals, Hiccup uncorked gourd and gave the contents a tentative sniff, he winced at the strong alcoholic smell.

"Wot's in the gourd, lad?" Fergus questioned him.

Hiccup mentally cursed at being put on the spotlight again. "It's a drink called Dragon's breath. It's made by our blacksmith and it's incredibly strong."

"Why would he send you such a thing?" There was a note of distaste on the Queen's voice.

Hiccup shrugged. "Professional pride, maybe? Until recently I didn't had enough status to even get near the stuff. So I've never tried it, not a sip."

"There's nae time like the present lad! A wanna try some too!" Fergus was eager to test his mettle against the foreign drink.

A cough and a glare from the Queen made him reconsider.

"On second thought, A have to get up early tomorrow, so A probably shouldn't." He laughed nervously.

Hiccup nodded and tied the gourd to his belt.

* * *

><p>Filler with a dash of set up, not exactly the best combination in a chapter, but I needed something between the good parts. What good parts, you say? That's mean.

**Holy crap! I'm eight reviews away from reaching a hundred! Write something on the box below and you too can be part of this momentous occasion. Space is limited, so you better hurry up! Our operators are standing by. **

21. Chapter 21

Super special awesome fudge coated chocolaty mega thanks to Heartlessly Awesome for his help in betaing (Is that a word?) this chapter.

And so I heard a proclamation from the heavens as a deep booming voice reverberated in my head. It said: Hear my decree, for thou must accept that neither HTTYD nor Brave 2012 belong to thee.

* * *

><p>Chapter 21<p>

Next morning, Hiccup decided to take it easy. Instead of getting up before dawn to feed Toothless and a quick breakfast, he stayed in bed until well after the sun rose. This, he told himself, had nothing to do with the fact he was sure Montgomery would laugh at him the whole day, not one bit. When he got enough sleep, he went to get some breakfast at the throne room. Instead of a table full of food and chatter he found an assembly of people talking to the king and queen while the princess watched with a scowl on her face.

As soon as the people there noticed his presence an uncomfortable silence descended on the room.

"Please step forward, Master Haddock." The Queen gently ordered him and the crowd parted until he was standing before the monarchs. "We have been receiving reports of dragon related incidents ranging from mere sightings to property damage and slaughtered livestock." Someone in the background yelled something about cabbages but no one paid him any attention. "As of yet no human casualties have been reported but as a Monarch I cannot ignore my people's pleas of help. Do you understand why I am telling you this, Master Haddock?"

"I understand your Majesty. I'll depart as soon as I'm ready." Hiccup mentally assessed the situation. There was a dragon causing trouble, but since it hadn't killed anyone, the Queen had given him the chance to find a peaceful solution before King Fergus implemented a violent one.

"How do we know the boy didn't cause this to begin with," shouted someone in the crowd, the declaration was accompanied by agreeing murmurs. "We can't trust themâ€¦ controlling dragonsâ€¦ cabbagesâ€¦ his ownâ€¦"

The murmurs rose in volume until the Queen silenced the crowd with a gesture and a frown. "This person is a guest of Scotland and the royal family; as such, his presence is always accounted for. I will have no baseless accusations in my court."

In the ensuing silence, Ian Macintosh made his way to stand beside Hiccup. "If it pleases your Majesty, I would accompany Lord Haddock in his endeavor. To ensure there are no further misunderstandings about his intentions."

"Aye, A would help as well." The Dingwall heir walked over to the two teens along with Doric, who also proclaimed his desire to accompany them. Well, at least that is what they thought he said.

The Queen looked at them seriously before nodding slowly. "That is acceptable. If that is all, you may leave to prepare yourselves. Unless there are any objections?"

The courtroom was silent as no one dared to speak against the Queen and the clans. The four suitors bowed and left the throne room so the assembly could continue. As soon as the doors closed behind them, Ian gave a noisy sigh and visibly deflated. "That went well." He turned to Hiccup. "You, my friend, have timing worthy of a main character. That meeting was minutes away from dissolving into a brawl."

"Isn't that a little extreme for something so minor?"

"Matters of the court are seldom as they seem. Private interests and secret agendas abound." Ian lectured him.

William agreed with a nod. "Shame about the brawl though. Would have been fun."

The Macintosh heir snorted but didn't disagree, a brawl would have been fun, but there was better game afoot. "What's our first move, mighty dragon hunter?"

"Dragon tamer," He corrected. "And firstâ€¦" He let the silence stretch for a moment. "Breakfast, after that we need to gather all the information we can dig up to see if we can figure out what kind

of dragon we're dealing with and see if there's a pattern to his sightings."

Ian wasn't satisfied with the answer but accepted that it would be dumb to charge in blindly. "I know just the man. Meet us in the east council room when you finish eating."

After a quick snack, hiccup spent the hours in a council room along with the other suitors and an old bushy bearded man who never stopped glaring at him. Hiccup figured the man had an important position within the kingdom, but for the life of him, he couldn't remember having ever seen him before. They went through all the reports trying to determine which of them were real, which one of them were fake, and pinpointing each one in what Hiccup considered a wildly inaccurate map. Something he considered strange, because he had seen better maps in history books. He didn't give the matter much thought since the map was good enough for their purposes and they were just about finished anyways.

"This last one is most troubling as it occurred here in town. Angus McMillan has reported that his only daughter was kidnapped by a black dragon." The bushy bearded man's scowl deepened, causing Hiccup to sigh.

"I'll remind you one more time that dragons don't kidnap young maidens, they don't kill indiscriminately and they don't hoard treasureâ€¦ well, none that you'd find valuable."

"Another for the discarded pile then," Ian commented. "I wonder what happened to the girl."

Hiccup gave him a sidelong glance. "If those gossiping women that visit the shop are to be believed, she got tired of waiting for her drunkard dad to give her his blessings to get married and ran away with her boyfriend to some southern town whose name I can't remember."

"You got all that from overhearing a conversation?" Ian was impressed.

Hiccup's expression turned pained. "A conversation? Ian those women, they don't shut up. Ever." He mussed his own hair trying to calm down. "I never thought I would miss the Viking's natural penchant towards grim silence but with Thor as my witness, I do." Taking a deep breath to calm himself, he continued as if nothing had happened. "What's important is that there isn't a discernable pattern in here." He gestured to the map. "Even if we take out the maybe's it doesn't make sense."

"Maybe it's looking for something â€" or someone." William showed that he was paying attention.

"There could also be more than one of them." Ian considered.

Hiccup shrugged helplessly. "Whatever the case, the pattern is too erratic to make an accurate prediction."

"So this was useless." Ian seemed a bit put off.

"Not necessarily," Hiccup assured him. "At least we know the

situation isn't as bad as we were told." He turned his full attention at the map on the table. "Out of all the reports we've gone through, more than half have been outright lies or questionable at best. That means we won't have to work as hastily as we thought."

"So?" Ian didn't see how that was a good thing, it meant they had no solid leads to follow.

Hiccup smiled "I get to build something first."

XxX

Despite the reassurance that something disastrous wasn't looming, Hiccup knew they still had to act with some haste or people would start complaining. To that end, he decided not to go all the way back to town to do what he needed. Not to mention that he was still a little leery of meeting with Montgomery just yet. Opting instead to use the castle smithy, knowing that even as abandoned and in disarray as it was, there should still be enough tools and odd ends laying around to do what he needed to do.

To his surprise, he found the smithy completely renovated and restocked by what he would later find out were princess Merida's orders. Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, Hiccup went to work. When he finally came out of the workshop, sundown was rapidly approaching. Arguing that the information they had suggested the dragon was nocturnal he convinced the others to wait until the next day.

XxX

It was the crack of dawn when the three heirs found Hiccup and Toothless dragging a heavy sack out into the courtyard. They all looked ready for action and armed to the teeth.

The young Viking waved at them in greeting. "You guys look ready to take down an army. You just need some minor adjustments to your gear and we'll be ready to go.

"Wot sort of adjustments?" William looked especially sharp that morning.

"You're going to need to leave your weapons behind for one, then w-"

"Leave Stab Blooder behind?" Ian looked scandalized. "Are you mad?"

Hiccup made a gesture by separating his thumb and index fingers a small distance. This response was not reassuring.

Doric questioned the decision to leave the weapons behindâ€¦ well they thought he did. That was what Hiccup answered at any rate. "It's because dragons are dangerous." Seeing the looks of incredulity they were giving him, he stopped for a moment before continuing. "Hear me out, okay? When I say that dragons are dangerous, I mean that all dragons can be dangerous, even the little one that the princess uses as a headdress." The grimace on Hiccup's face told them how difficult it was for him to admit that. "But just because they are dangerous doesn't mean they're evil. If you approach the situation

swinging your sword, it would make things even more dangerous."

"That doesn't make any sense. How can I be in more danger when I'm armed?" Ian's face showed he was the most reluctant.

Hiccup frowned, trying to find the right words. "Let's be serious, I've seen you guys train and I know you're very good. But you're trained to fight people. Bringing your weapons will give you a false sense of security and kick in reactions, attitudes, and instincts that will get you killed."

"And how are we to defend ourselves without our weapons?" Ian still wasn't convinced.

Massaging the bridge of his nose, Hiccup answered him. "Weapons aren't meant for defense they are meant to attack."

"Now you're just discussing semantics." Ian shot back.

"A little bit," Hiccup admitted. "But that's my point. Dragons aren't as up to par in rhetoric as us. If they see us with weapons they aren't going to assume we carry them for protection, because weapons are for killing. For protection that will actually protect us, we need these." He showed them all the sack he had been dragging and pulled out-

"Shields? You expect us to just use shields?"

"Of course I am. Shields can be your most important weapon; it can be used to attack and defend without looking threatening and it's much more effective at blocking you from a continuous stream of magnesium fueled flames than a five inch wide sword."

"Hate to say it but that's a good point." William put his spear on a weapons rack and grabbed one of Hiccup's shields, frowning as he felt something off. "This feels strange, different."

"Yes. I had to modify them because the shields you have here aren't strong enough to handle dragons," Hiccup informed them.

That seemed to convince Doric as he put his axes away and picked up the sack Hiccup was carrying. Immediately noting something he pulled out a shield twice the size of the other ones, he nodded in approval at how heavy it was.

Hiccup noticed that. "I gave that one a little something extra, so if anything gets too dangerous stand behind Doric."

"You mean you spent all day yesterday making shields?" Ian didn't know what to think about that.

"Not exactly, I didn't really make them; I had to cannibalize the shields in the armory so-" He shook his head. "I reinforced them as much as I could with the time I had, so they should be able to withstand a few good hits."

"That is not as reassuring as you think." Ian told him.

"It's the best I could do. Now put your weapons away and grab a

shield or you're not going." Hiccup's tone left no room for arguments.

XxX

Standing at the gates of the castle, the royal family minus the princess stood waiting to wish good luck to the suitors on their journey. The Queen commended the four of them on their bravery and the King expressed some good-natured jealousy over their adventure.

Once the pleasantries were over, Ian pointed to the elephant in the room. "Forgive my boldness your Highness; does the princess not want to see us off?"

The Queen answered without missing a beat. "The princess had a rough day yesterday. I thought it prudent to let her sleep in today."

Ian nodded once in acknowledgement. "I understand, your Highness."

"I am sure that if Merida were here she would wish you all the best of luck in your endeavor," Elinor told them in a softer tone of voice.

Knowing what he knew of Merida, Hiccup doubted that statement. His suspicions were confirmed when a new voice entered the conversation. "Nae A wouldn't, An A won't have to, cause A'm coming with ye!"

The reactions to that statement were as varied as the people who heard it. King Fergus started laughing uproariously, Queen Elinor palmed her face and sighed, William stared blankly at nothing, Ian could not stop a small frown from planting itself in his face, Hiccup and Doric stared at the picture the princess presented to them: Mounted on her horse with a sword on her hip and a bow on her back, she had a proud posture and held her head up, proudly; silently daring them to contradict her.

The Queen took the challenge head on. "You are not going with them, young lady."

"Woot!?"

To the surprise of all present they both started to argue right then and there. Their discussion lasted until they both turned to Hiccup who, after making sure he wouldn't have to dodge some errant thrown axe or a spiked mace like in a normal Viking discussion, had tuned them out in favor of going over the information he had in his head. "I'm sorry, what?"

The scowls from both women told him that was the wrong answer. "You are being asked your opinion as leader of this expedition, Master Haddock. I believe that you can guess the subject."

He could. "I have no problem with the princess coming with us--"

Merida's face lit up.

"As long as she agrees to one condition."

Then she glared at him.

"That goes for you guys too." He turned to face the other suitors. "If you want to come the condition is that you do exactly what I tell you, how I tell you, when I tell you. When we're out there, we cannot afford a debate like back on the courtyard."

The heirs agreed rather quickly, they had already left their weapons behind, they might as well follow the instructions of someone who looked like he knew what he was doing. When they turned back to the princess she still had a defiant scowl on her face.

"I'm serious, Princess." Hiccup's tone was firm. "Mistakes cost limbs at best and lives at worst."

There was a conflict clear on Merida's face before she shot a quick glance at Hiccup's prosthetic and finally accepted. "Fine ye win. But ye better not leave me out of the action."

"I doubt there will be much action, but I'll keep that in mind. Now go put your weapons away please."

"Wot!?" Merida and Fergus chorused.

"It's a simple request."

"Nae, it's not!"

"The condition, remember?" Hiccup reminded her.

"But, why?"

Instead of answering Hiccup turned around. "Let's go guys."

"Alright, A Get it!" She shouted. "But ye have to tell me why!"

"Because they don't have weapons either." Hiccup gestured to the three clan heirs.

Merida blushed at her lack of attention, not noticing the others were weaponless too. She took off her weapons and handed them to her dad.

"The dagger in your dress too, please." Hiccup commented absently.

"Why do ye know wot's in me daughter's dress?" Fergus narrowed his eyes.

Hiccup didn't recognize the loaded question. "She told me." He made a gesture to Doric, whose horse was carrying spare shields, to give one to the princess.

The Queen's tone did a better job. "Would you care to elaborate, Master Haddock?"

"Oh, ummâ€¦ We were talking about good places for hidden weapons and

she told me she kept a dagger on her dress in case someone tried to get friendly without her consent," Hiccup nervously told the Queen.

The answer seemed to appease the Queen, but she still took him aside to talk to him privately. "Master Haddockâ€¦ no, Hiccup, do you not think you are acting too rashly?"

"Taking a bunch of highly important people untrained and unarmed to face a dangerous and unpredictable mythical fire breathing beast? No, not at all." Hiccup deadpanned.

Elinor resisted the urge to smack Hiccup in the back of the head and settled for giving him one of those Queenly looks that made people squirm. Hiccup did not disappoint.

"I know this seems rushed, but I have thought about it and this is the best I can do with the time I have available. Besides, things are not as terrible as they appear. They are scary and dangerous but dragons are not inherently evil; they're like any other animal, as long as they can be understood they can be trained to be peaceful."

"The fact that you seem to know what you are doing quells many of my worries. However, I have to question your decision to bring Merida along." Looking at the boy's uncomprehending stare, Elinor couldn't help but sigh. "There are still many cultural idiosyncrasies that you have yet to recognize, Master Haddock. I suppose that is why you get along so well with my daughter."

Hiccup was starting to understand what the problem was and tried to reassure her. "Your Highness, Dragons are very fast aerial creatures, I don't expect we'll find anything today, tomorrow or next week. We're going to spend the vast majority of the time tracking him down and trying to establish a pattern. She'll probably get bored way before we find anything useful."

"I believe you underestimate my daughter's stubbornness, Master Haddock."

The Queen still looked doubtful, so Hiccup did one last pitch. "If you're really worried, I'm sure you can find something else for her to do when we get closer to finding the dragon. What are the chances we'll find anything today of all days?"

* * *

><p>Attention world council, for I have taken your beloved chapter hostage. The price for its release? â€œPuts pinky on mouth-One hundredâ€¦ Reviews! â€œ" Cue music stingâ€œ

BUHAHAHAHA

WHAHAHAHA

HAHAHAH- Hack, I think I swallowed a bug. You have my ultimatum. Author away!

22. Chapter 22

****A big steaming pile of thanks to Heartlessly Awesome, for all the help during the creation of this fic.****

****HTTYD and Brave 2012 are owned by Cressida Cowell, Dreamworks Animation, Pixar Animation Studios and Walt Disney Pictures. Support the official release!****

* * *

><p>Chapter 22<p>

Watching the five teenagers grow smaller in the distance, Elinor couldn't shake a feeling of uneasiness. She reasoned that it could be because of the task set before them, because her daughter was going, or because as the young Viking so aptly put it, they were going unarmed and without the proper training. She had almost stopped them from going until the Viking boy could properly instruct them in how to behave around and safely interact with other dragons besides his mount. However, young Hiccup was right in that time was an important factor; since the longer the matter remained unresolved, the more the relationship between her kingdom and the dragon taming island of Berk would suffer.

Seeing the worried look on his wife's face, Fergus pulled her close to give her a hug. "Do nae worry too much, me love. A hate to admit it, but the lad know wot he's doing." Gently guiding her back to the castle, he noted one of the shields that the youngsters were carrying propped against a wall; absentmindedly picking it up to put it on a rack, he immediately frowned when he felt something off. "Sheamus! Bring me the Quartermaster, now!

XxX

Having decided to go to the last credible dragon sighting on the reports a few days prior, the four Scottish teens rode at a somewhat leisurely pace while Hiccup and Toothless flew in circles above them, using the high altitude to scout ahead. Every once in a while he would descend and fly closer to them, telling them about dragons. "It's important to keep in mind is that with some exceptions dragons are stronger, tougher, faster-" He gave Dingwall a quick look nobody noticed. "-and sometimes smarter than you."

Merida rolled her eyes. "Tell me something A donae know."

Hiccup smiled. "This is important. Vikings have been around dragons for centuries and we still sometimes forget that."

"Maybe yer jus' dumb." Merida teased.

"That is a distinct possibility," Hiccup admitted. "But I believe it has more to do with stubbornness."

"What will be the correct way to proceed once we find the dragon?" Ian interrupted the banter.

"To turn around and go home," Hiccup answered without missing a beat. "Since that is not a possibility at the moment, you have to remember that a great part of surviving has to do with your attitude. Awe,

respect, and a healthy dose of fear are all good emotions to have when confronted with a wild dragon; aggression of any kind, not so much." Having said that, he went back to his scouting position high above them; occasionally coming back down to give them tips to help them get ready. Telling them to never let them out of your sight, if they tense their posture, stop what you're doing and slowly back away. Don't cover your head with the shield until you know where the blast is going, among other pieces of advice to keep them safe.

After a few hours of riding, they arrived at a small farm, Merida frowned at the way the owner never stopped glaring at Hiccup while at the same time showering her and the heirs with flattering words.

The man took them to the place where the dragon had been causing trouble; there were burn marks and loose soil everywhere. "We were having dinner when we heard a horrible roar comin' from the clearin' where A keep me cows. Me wife didn' want me to see wot it was, an by the time A convinced her and readied me weapons, the beast was already gone. An he left A bloody mess too, ripped one me cows in half! There was blood an guts everywhere, took me all day to gather everythin an burn it."

Once the farmer finished his tale, Merida quickly dismissed him back to his house. The man looked like he wanted to say more but he complied. "Wot do ye think happened?" She asked Hiccup.

"I'm not sure," He answered truthfully. "Something doesn't fit. This seems needlessly violent. If it wanted to eat the cow, it would have picked it up and carry it to somewhere more peaceful, and since it ripped the cow in half it's obvious that it was strong enough to do so." Running a hand through his hair, Hiccup tried to find an answer. "We have too little information to know anything for sure. Let's just split up and look for clues."

"The events that man recounted to us perplexes me," Ian spoke up after a few minutes of silence. "Someone of his economic standing would endeavor to salvage what he could from his animal. Why then, did he burn the remains?"

Merida rolled her eyes at the Macintosh heir's flowery speech but she had never spent enough time around peasants to know if the question had merit. Surprisingly, it was William who ventured a guess. "Fear of disease? It was attacked by unknowns."

"I think I know why." Hiccup waved them to his location where he was looking at something on the floor. "Look familiar?"

"It's that gunk we found on the flower field." Ian immediately recognized it.

Merida wrinkled her nose. "Wot is that?"

"An attack on the senses," William helpfully replied.

And indeed, even after a few days the black goo still smelled horrible and the vegetation around it was dead and already rotting.

"This the same creature we came across during our excursion through

the wilderness, princess. When investigating a half burned field we came across the same black goo," Ian explained.

"Let's spread out and look for clues," Hiccup suggested. "Try to find out where it came from or where it's heading."

Eventually, Doric found something at the edge of the forest. Hiccup looked at the scratched up tree and took to the sky to get an areal view of the area, frowning at what he saw.

XxX

They spent the rest of the afternoon following the strange trail that Doric found. It was difficult to make out from the ground but when seen from above, it was obvious that the top branches of certain trees were broken or completely snapped off. It was as if the dragon didn't care and just plowed through - a peculiar conduct to say the least, because dragons were very good at avoiding obstacles. "Maybe he's marking his territory?" He thought out loud. That would be bad; dragons were especially ferocious when defending their territory from perceived threats.

Every once in a while, the trail of broken branches stopped completely, only to start again either farther down the way or going in a completely random direction. Looking up at the sky, Hiccup decided that even if they still had some hours of daylight, it would be better to head back to the castle for the night. Hiccup wasn't a good tracker and he doubted the other four were much better. As it was, they didn't even know if they were moving closer or away from the dragon. Tomorrow, knowing what to look for and with a competent tracker by their side, they would be in much better shape.

Hiccup's planning was interrupted when he saw a blue glow in the distance. _Dragon's fire?_ Toothless's flame was blue. It wasn't farfetched that other dragons would have them too. _Maybe it's another Nighthfuryâ€¦_ "Come on bud, let's check it out." Toothless warbled in agreement and speeded off. By the time they landed in the forest the light was already gone. _Did it sense us?_ Toothless growled when the glow reappeared deeper into the forest, Hiccup could have sworn he heard giggling in the distance. Deciding to give chase, they had no choice but to pursue on foot; the thickening forest making flight a bad idea. Getting tired after a while of running, he paused for a moment to catch his breath and noticed that no matter how much he ran, the blue glow was always the same distance from them. They chased it until the end of the forest, where it disappeared completely. It didn't matter though, because he found what he was looking for. "What the?"

XxX

The riders down below were making a respectable pace as they traveled through the forest and still Merida found herself annoyed. _We're slowing him down._ It was irritating to her that she would slow someone down but she couldn't deny it either. Since Hiccup had made sure to always keep them on his line of sight, he was always on _their_ line of sight as well, and she could clearly see that the dragon, Toothless, rarely flapped his wings to keep up their pace; instead, he seemed to just be floating lazily up in the sky. Merida had seen birds do that, but the dragon should be too heavy for that. She didn't know how it could do that, but she understood its meaning.

It barely had to exert itself to go as fast as they were.

Merida's internal grumbling was cut short when she saw their airborne companion suddenly speed off and quickly disappear from view. _So fastâ€|_ Transfixed as she was by the burst of speed, she had to snap herself out of it in order to pursue. "Oi, look alive ye all! Hiccup found something." Spurring her horse, she rapidly pulled ahead of the group, who didn't take much time to catch up with her. She didn't worry about the direction they were going, she knew they were on the right track. Their fast pace lasted until the forest, growing thicker and thicker, started to slow down their progress.

As they advanced, they all started to notice the forest growing more and more silent, as well as the horses slowing their pace more than needed to advance. The three heirs knew what that meant because they experienced it in the past, back in the very first time they met Hiccup. And just like then, soon the horses stopped advancing altogether, refusing to take another step further. Rather than force them like last time, they hopped off and continued on foot.

Ian swept his gaze all around them, trying to find any sign of danger, his hand itching to reach for a sword he knew wasn't there. "The dragon we're looking for is more than likely in the vicinity. Please let us make sure it's safe up ahead."

Rolling her eyes at the request, Merida shouldered her way past the three heirs and walked proudly ahead of them. Her proud march stopped as soon as she got out and sawâ€| "â€|Bigâ€|" She whispered.

No other word could be used to describe the beast she was seeing, although terrifying was a close second. It was a good deal bigger than the dragons she had seen before. Pitch black and well armored, its arms and legs ended in wicked looking claws. Two massive black wings, each with a talon where it had spiky protrusions all over its body made from the same carapace like armor that covered most of its body; on the back of its neck, on its tail, shoulders, knees, elbows, the sides of its chest. What would a creature so big need so many spikes for? Merida didn't know, she didn't want to find out either. To top it off, two more of those spikes went out both the back of its head and its cheekbones; its snout was lined with a row of triangle shaped teeth. The feature that most drew her attention was the creature's eyes, a solid pupil-less red that seemed to shine with malevolence. In her opinion, they made the dragon look evil given physical form, not even the fact that it stood as still as a statue, staring blankly ahead. _Is it even breathing?_ changed that. _An he tames these things?_

Her inspection was cut short when she heard a low menacing growl by her side. Quickly turning to the source of the sound, she was surprised to see Toothless the dragon crouched and ready to pounce at a moment's notice. His earflaps were pressed against his head, his narrowed eyes stared forward with startling intensity, never taking his gaze away from his master. Merida felt a little ashamed that she had noticed their foreign guest last. He was halfway between her position and the motionless dragon with the shield he had been carrying strapped across his back. With his arms stretched wide, he would slowly take a step and then stop, making wordless soothing noises for a couple of minutes before taking another step. All the while being completely ignored by the unmoving beast.

She was dimly aware of the clan heirs standing behind equally transfixed at the seen before them. Her lack of attention cost her when a terrified neigh behind her _Angus!_ caught the attention of all those present, _all of them._ "Oh Hell!"

XxX

Coming out of the forest, Hiccup instantly spotted the black dragon doing a surprisingly accurate imitation of the Dingwall clan's heir. Taking a step in the unknown dragon's direction, his progress was immediately stopped by Toothless, who jumped in front of him and tried to push him back. "Calm down buddy; it's okay, look. It's obviously not that aggressive if it's tolerating our presence." _We're up wind, there's no way it hasn't noticed us yet._

Toothless growled and pushed back harder. "Come on, Toothless! The sooner we do this, the safer those guys will be." The dragon warbled piteously. "Don't be a drama queen. I need you to keep a sharp eye and protect all of us if things go south, okay?" Toothless made a disgruntled noise and reluctantly got out of the way. "Okay, here comes the tricky part." Slowly walking to where he considered a safe distance, Hiccup reduced the speed of his approach considerably and started making noises he knew dragons considered soothing, trying to be the least threatening possible.

The more he drew near, the more he slowed down; the more he slowed down physically, the more he speed up mentally. _â€|big, halfway between a Nightmare and a Boneknapperâ€| medium sized arms ending in claws made for tearing and rippingâ€| bipedalâ€| claws on feet close look similar to a Nadder's, good for graving prey mid-flight. Shape suggest a more offensive useâ€| half burnt fieldâ€| it has a fire breath of some kind. Nature of fire and shot limit unknownâ€| shape of teeth suggest a diet of meat instead of fish. Most likely boar and deerâ€| immobile and inattentive, sleeping?... reports indicate nocturnal habits; color reinforces theoryâ€| segmented armor, good for mobilityâ€| too much armor, clumsy flyerâ€| Solid red eyes, no pupils. High intimidation factorâ€| nocturnalâ€| red eyesâ€| different kind of sight?... unusual amount of spikes thorough its body... spikesâ€| clawsâ€| armorâ€| most dangerous at close range, built for melee. Might have close range fire breathâ€| too many pointy bits to be ridden safelyâ€|talons on wings, they're for areal fights against other dragons! To target their wingsâ€| unknown capac-_

The analysis ended abruptly when he was startled by the terrified neigh of a horse. Unfortunately he wasn't the only one startled by the noise. The dragon, finally noticing the tiny human in the middle of the field, roared thunderously and charged. "Oh Hel!"

* * *

><p>Cliffhanger! I think?

Well, anyway, you guys are going to have to sit tight; because I suck at writing action scenes, so the next chapter is gonna take me a while t write. Hopefully I can come up with something entertaining.

On other news: We did it guys, we reached a hundred reviews!

****Celebrate good times, come on!****

****(Lets celebrate)****

****I wish I had something prepared for such momentous occasion,
â€"Pulls out sheet f paperâ€" I would like to thank the academy for
such a tremendous hono- Wrong speechâ€" Oh, ok. To think a simple man
like me could win a Pulitzerâ€" Damn it, it's not this one eitherâ€"
Let's see, ummm. Speech for winning pie eating contest, Eisner award,
Emmy, Grammy, Tonyâ€" Becoming pope, being elected El Precidenteâ€"
Where the hell is that speech? â€"Walks offâ€"****

End
file.